

THE NOVELS AND ROMANCES

OF

ALPHONSE DAUDET

Handy Library Edition

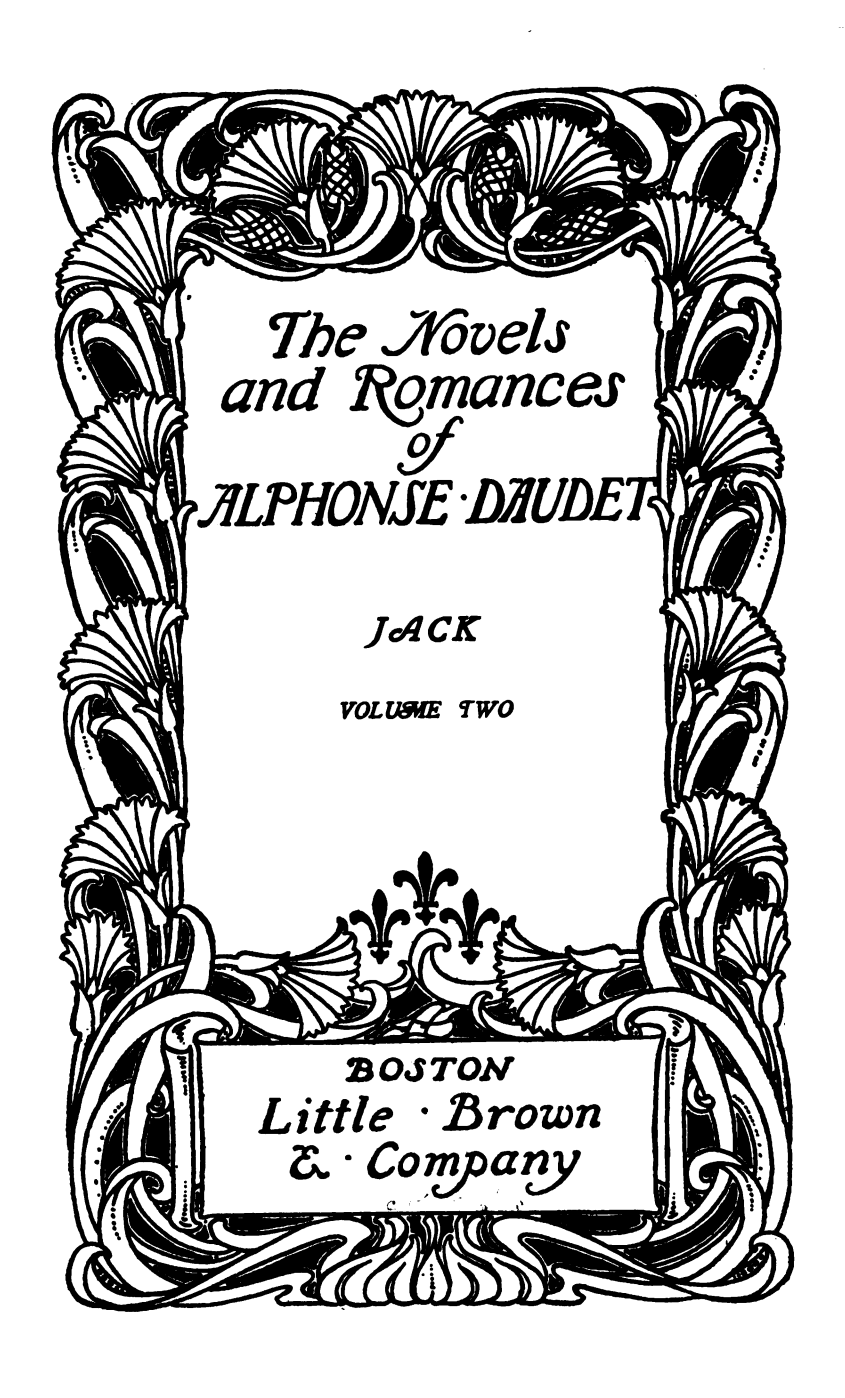
JACK

VOLUME TWO



Goupil & C° Paris

Jack and Monsieur Rivals


The Novels
and Romances
of
ALPHONSE · DAUDET
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ILLUSTRATIONS

From drawings by Adrien Moreau.

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PART II. (*Continued*).

II.

THE SCREW.

IN the middle of the forge, an immense hall-like room, imposing as a temple, where the daylight enters in yellow and luminous bars, and the shadows of the corners are suddenly illuminated by vivid flashes of red, an enormous piece of iron fastened to the ground, opens like some ever-ravenous jaw, always in motion, seizing and pressing the red-hot metal fashioned by the hammer, amid a shower of sparks. This is the Screw.

As the starting-point of an apprentice's education, he is set to working the Screw.[1] There, while handling the heavy vice, work that demands far more strength than a child's arms possess, he is learning as well the various tools of the workshop, and the handling and setting-up of iron.

Little Jack is working the Screw! And I might for ten years search unsuccessfully for any other

[1] At the present time, apprentices at Indret live apart from the workmen. They have their own workshops, tools, and work, adapted to their strength. Indret has become a model school for apprentices.

words that could express more exactly the feeling of terror, suffocation, and horrible anguish which his surroundings caused him.

First of all, there was that frightful deafening noise, three hundred hammers falling simultaneously upon the anvil, the whistling of leather bands, the working of pulleys, and all the uproar of a hive of busy workers, three hundred chests, bare and panting, strained to the utmost, and cries that bore no longer the least resemblance to anything human, uttered in such a frenzy of strength that the muscles seemed to crack and respiration to cease. Wagons, loaded with red-hot metal, rolled across the room upon rails, the great bellows of the forge snorted, blowing fire into fire, feeding the flame with human heat also. Clanking, rattling, grating, rumbling, snarling, and howling noises were heard. One might almost believe himself in the wild temple of some tyrannic and barbarous idol. On the walls hung rows of tools fashioned like instruments of torture, hooks and tongs and pincers. Heavy chains were suspended from the ceiling, everything expressed rude, hard, overpowering brute strength, and at one end of the workshop hid in sombre and almost religious shade, was a gigantic steam-hammer of thirty tons' weight, gliding slowly between its castings, and regarded by the workmen with respect and admiration as though it were the black, shining Baal of this temple dedicated to the God of strength. Whenever the idol speaks, there is a deep, sullen sound that shakes the

walls, the ceiling, the ground, while clouds of dust fly from the slag.

Jack was amazed at all this. He kept at work silently among the men who swarmed about the Screw, hairy, half-naked, perspiring, carrying iron bars, their tips red-hot, bracing themselves, twisting, seeming to become as supple as the fiery and molten metal under the flame, whilst they moved about in that furnace. Ah! if the glance of that absurd Charlotte could have traversed space, and seen her Jack in the midst of this human swarm, pale, emaciated, dripping with sweat, his blouse and shirt open upon that white and delicate chest, his sleeves rolled up from his little lean arms, his eyes red and inflamed by the fine sharp dust floating in the air, what pity, what remorse would have filled her!

As every one answers to some nickname in the workshop, Jack had been nicknamed "Aztec,"[1] on account of his extreme leanness, and the pretty fair-haired boy of other days stood in a fair way of winning a right to this name, of becoming the typical factory-child, that wretched, overworked, stifled, stunted being whose face ages more and more as his body wastes away.

"Hi! Aztec! spry there, my boy! Turn the screw. Go it firm now! Why, d—— it all, what ails you?"

It is the voice of the foreman Lebescam, the *contre-coup*, who speaks in the midst of this wild

[1] Aztec. *Argot* for a weakly, stunted person; possibly in allusion to the Mexican dwarfs.

whirlwind of sounds. This black giant, to whom Roudic had entrusted the apprentice's education during those first days, interrupts his own work now and then to give the boy some instructions, to show him how to hold the hammer. The teacher is brutal, the pupil is awkwardness itself. The master regards his weakness with utter contempt, and the boy is frightened at sight of all this strength. He does what he is told to do, screws the vice as well as he can, but his hands are covered with sores and blisters, so that they burn him and set him crying. There are moments when he is no longer conscious of his own existence. It seems to him that he himself is merely a part of that complicated machinery, that he is but an instrument among other instruments, a sort of unconscious pulley, that, devoid of all will, turns, whizzing, along with the rest of the gearing, directed by an occult invisible force which at last he knows, admires, and fears: steam.

It is the work of steam to intermingle in the roof of the building, all those leather bands, ascending, descending, crossing each other, connected by pulleys, hammers, and bellows. It is steam that moves the gigantic Nasmyth hammer, and those enormous planing machines beneath which the hardest iron is converted into shavings. no thicker than a thread, twisted and curled like so much hair. It is steam that darts into the corners of the forge jets of fire that distribute activity and energy to all parts of the workroom. It makes that dull, heavy sound, that regular, strong pulsa-

tion that impressed the boy so much when he first entered, and already it seems to him that he lives by this power, that it has absorbed his very breath and made of him as docile a thing as those great machines it moves.

Terrible existence after two years of freedom and open-air life at Les Aulnettes!

At five in the morning Father Roudic called him. "Halloa there, youngster!" The voice resounded through all the house, which was built only of boards. They swallowed a few mouthfuls of bread in haste. Standing beside the table they drank a glass of wine, poured by pretty Clarisse, still in her nightcap. Then they set off for the iron-works, whose melancholy, indefatigable bell was sounding "*Ding! dong!*" as if it desired to rouse not alone the island of Indret, but the neighboring banks, the water, the sky, the port of Paimbœuf, and even Saint-Nazaire itself. A dull tramp was heard in the streets, a rush through the yards, at the doors of the workshops. And after the ten minutes allowed by the regulations had elapsed, the flag was lowered, announcing that the factory was closed to those who were tardy. For the first absence a small amount was withheld on pay day, the second absence was followed by suspension, and the third by a final discharge.

D'Argenton's rules, oppressive and rigorous though they were, were nothing compared to these.

Jack was terribly afraid of "missing the flag," and he was generally at the door long before the

first bell rang. One day, however, two or three months after his entrance to the iron works, the maliciousness of some of the other apprentices prevented his arriving in time. That morning the wind blew from the sea with that joyous strength it gains in passing over a broad expanse, caught Jack's cap as he was entering the factory and carried it away.

"Stop it, stop it!" cried the child, running down the whole length of the sloping street, but instead of stopping it, an apprentice passing by, gave it a kick, sending it farther away; another did the same, and another. The sport became highly amusing for all but Jack, who ran with all his might, in the midst of hooting, hisses, shouts of laughter, restraining his great longing to cry as best he might, for he knew only too well what hatred lurked behind this coarse mirth. Meanwhile the last strokes of the bell rang, and he was obliged to abandon his pursuit of the hat, and retrace his steps quickly. He was in despair, for a cap costs a good deal! He would have to write his mother, and ask for money, and if d'Argenton should see that letter! But what disheartened him most of all was the hatred that surrounded him, betraying itself even in the smallest things. There are beings who cannot live without love, just as there are some plants that cannot exist without warmth, and Jack was one of these. As he ran, he asked himself sorrowfully: "Why is it? What have I ever done to them?"

As he reached the door, which had not yet closed

— panting for breath, he heard a halting step behind him, a snort like an animal's, and suddenly a huge hand was placed upon his shoulder; he turned around and saw a smiling red-haired monster, whose smile died away in a thousand tiny wrinkles; — the monster had brought him back the cap, which he had found. For the second time since his arrival at Indret, Jack encountered that kindly smile, that familiar face. Where had he seen both for the first time? Ah, now he remembered! It was upon the Corbeil road, — the peddler fleeing before the storm with a load of hats upon his shoulders. But at this moment there was no time to renew their acquaintance, for the overseer cried out, as he lowered the flag, "Hi, there, Aztec, hurry!" He could only seize his cap, and thank Bélisaire, who hobbled away down the street.

That day when he worked the screw, Jack felt less forlorn than usual. He could seem to see all day long that beautiful Corbeil road winding through the very midst of the forge; its parks and lawns, the doctor's carriage returning homeward at twilight, along the border of the forest, and the freshness of those meadows of which he dreamed, the glimpses of the river he seemed to sight in the midst of that infernal region, filled him with feverish sensations; cold shivers crept over him, followed by burning heat. After he left the works, he sought Bélisaire in every part of Indret, but the peddler was not to be found. The next day, and the following, no sign of him. And by degrees

that ugly apparition, which recalled to him so many beautiful realities, faded from his memory, but slowly, with difficulty, and with the same limping gait with which it walked the earth. Then he returned again to the old solitude.

In the shop no one liked him. Every group of men seems to have need of a scapegoat, a being upon whom it may vent all the irony, the impatience, and nervousness caused by fatigue. Jack answered that purpose in the forge. The other apprentices had all been born at Indret, were sons or brothers of workmen, and they were protected and spared, for these persecutions, for which there is no reparation, are generally aimed at the weak and inoffensive and innocent. There was no one to speak in his defence. The "*contre-coup*" considered him too much of a weakling to trouble about him, and delivered him over to the tyranny and caprice of the entire building. For what business had he here at Indret, that delicate Parisian, who said "Yes sir," and "Thank you, sir," to his comrades? They had said he had a turn for mechanics, but the Aztec knew as little of that as of everything else. He was not able even to put in a rivet! Soon their contempt excited in these creatures a species of cold-blooded cruelty, the revenge brute strength sometimes takes upon intelligence mingled with weakness.

Not a day passed that they did not make him miserable in some petty way. The apprentices were especially ferocious. One day one of them passed him a piece of iron, heated to a dull red at

one end, with "Take that, Aztec!" In consequence he had a week at the infirmary. There was every sort of brutality and awkwardness on the part of these men, who were used to carrying heavy burdens, and had no idea of the force of their blows.

The only day Jack had any rest or recreation, was on Sunday. On that day he would take out one of the books Doctor Rivals had given him, and run off to read it upon the bank of the Loire. There was at the very end of the island a half-ruined tower called the Tower of Saint Hermeland, which seemed like a watchman's lodge of the time of the Norman invasion. At its foot in some hollow of the rock the apprentice would lie, his book open upon his knees, the murmurs, the magic, the sweep of the river before him. Sabbath bells filled the air, singing of peace, of rest from the toil of the week. Boats passed at a distance, and here and there, far away from him, children were bathing amid shouts and laughter.

He read, but often the books Monsieur Rivals had chosen were too much for him, quite escaped his comprehension, and merely left in his mind some kernel of truth which would germinate in time. Then he would pause for a moment, and sit dreaming, his thoughts far away, listening to the lapping of the river against the stones, and the regular movement of the ebbing tide. He was far, far away from the iron works and the workmen — his thoughts wandered to his mother and his little friend, to other happier Sundays when he was not

meanly clad as now, when after mass there had been delightful walks by the side of the radiant Charlotte, games of cards in the big pharmacy, which little Cécile's white apron lighted up with such serenity and childish charm.

Thus for a few hours he forgot Indret and was happy. But autumn came with its heavy rains and rude winds, breaking in upon his pilgrimages to Saint-Hermeland. Henceforth he spent his Sundays at the Roudics'.

The gentleness of the boy had touched these Roudics. They were very kind to him. Zénaïde was especially fond of him, looked after his linen with maternal care, with the brusque alertness that was a part of her, and surprising in a creature so ponderous. At the Château, when she worked there for the day, she talked of nothing but the apprentice. Father Roudic himself, though he had a certain contempt for the weakness and lack of workmanly craft the child displayed, would say: "Just the same, he 's a good little chap."

He thought, however, that the boy read too much, and sometimes would ask him laughingly whether he was studying to be a schoolmaster or *curé!* Despite which, he had a certain respect for him because he had the advantage of instruction. For, outside of his business of fitting, Father Roudic knew absolutely nothing, could read and write no more than when he left school, a fact that had inconvenienced him not a little since he had become an overseer and espoused the second Madame Roudic.

She was the daughter of an ordnance store-keeper, brought up as a young lady in a village-town, one of a numerous and impoverished family where each shared in the economy and labor of the household. Reduced to a marriage in which the disparity in age and education was great, she had until now assumed a protecting air towards her husband, mingled with calm affection. As for himself, he was lost in admiration before his wife, and as much of a lover as a youth of twenty, and would have willingly laid himself across the gutters for her to walk over, to save her wetting a foot. His regard for her was full of tenderness; she seemed to him far prettier, more coquettish than the wives of the other overseers, nearly all of them sturdy Bretonnes, more occupied with their households than the set of their caps.

Clarisse had in fact the style, the air of a girl who, in spite of poverty, is accustomed to a certain sort of elegance, because of her work itself; and she had at the tips of her fingers, which had been very idle since her marriage, an art of adorning herself which contrasted strongly with the almost nunlike appearance of the women of the country, who hide their hair under heavy bands of linen, and make their waists bigger with the stiff folds of their petticoats.

The house itself bore testimony to this refinement. Behind the flowing white muslin curtains that are the ornament of all these Breton houses the few bits of furniture fairly shone, so tidy and clean everything was, and there was always a pot

of basil or red gillyflower in the window-sill. When Roudic returned from his work each night it was ever a fresh delight to him to find the house in such order, and his wife as neat as though it were Sunday. He did not stop to wonder why it was that Clarisse was as idle as if it were the day of rest, nor why, after the preparations for the meals were ended, she leaned dreamily upon her elbow, instead of taking up some bit of sewing, as does a good housewife, finding the day all too short for the duties still unfulfilled.

He naïvely imagined, this honest Roudic, that in adorning herself, his wife thought only of him; and in Indret every one was too fond of him to undeceive him, to tell him that another possessed all the thoughts, all the affection of Clarisse.

How much truth was there in these rumors?

In all the gossip of the small town dropped from door to door by that little bird Rumor which flies so swift and so far, the name of Madame Roudic was inseparable from that of the Nantais.

If what every one said was true, it must be added that Clarisse and the Nantais had known each other before her marriage. He had seen her often at her father's when he accompanied Roudic, and if the nephew, that big, handsome, curly-haired fellow, had chosen to marry instead of his uncle, there is no doubt he would have obtained the preference as her choice. But the curled darling did not entertain the idea for a moment, and never perceived that Clarisse was fascinating, pretty, and dainty until she had become his little aunt, an aunt

with whom he soon grew accustomed to discuss, with a smile of amiable raillery, that singular relationship of theirs, he being a trifle the elder.

What followed?

With every facility afforded by close neighborhood, the intimacy permitted by relationship, those long *tête-à-têtes* during the evening, when Father Roudic had fallen asleep at a corner of the table and Zénaïde was still at the Château, finishing some bit of work that kept her later than usual, had those two uncertain and equally attracted natures strength to resist? It seemed scarcely possible. They were made for each other; the languor of Clarisse would lean so naturally for support upon the strong, sturdy shoulder of the handsome nephew.

But, in spite of appearances, no one was certain of anything. Moreover, the guilty, rather the accused couple found a pair of terribly keen eyes always upon them, Zénaïde's, for she had watched for some time this shadow of adultery brooding upon the paternal hearth.

She found ways of cutting short their interviews, of coming upon them unexpectedly, of looking them square in the face, that could only be the result of constant forethought. Tired after her day's work, she would sit down with her knitting of an evening, coming between the gayety of her cousin and the dreamy reverie of her stepmother who sat quite lost in thought, her arms hanging idly at her side, and could have passed the whole night listening to her handsome designer.

Beside the blind, unshaken confidence of old Roudic Zénaïde played the real part of the jealous husband. Imagine such a husband possessed of all the presentiments and sharp insight of a woman.

The battle between her and the Nantais was a vigorous one, and the superficial skirmishing they carried on quite openly, hid much sullen resentment, and mysterious antipathies. Old Roudic laughed at it all as the remains of an unavowed affection and cousinship seeking to be something more, but Clarisse sometimes grew pale as she listened and trembled in the very depths of her weak being, incapable as she was of resistance, but quite despairing at being confronted by her own sin.

At this time, Zénaïde had carried the day. She had manœuvred so well at the Château, that the manager, unable to persuade the Nantais to go to Guérigny, was about to send him to Saint Nazaire to study, for the benefit of the works, some machinery of a new model, just being put in use on the transatlantic steamers. It would take him some months to make the plans, and trace the working-drawing. Clarisse bore her stepdaughter no ill-will because of this departure, though she knew the latter was responsible for it; she even felt a certain sensation of relief. She was one of those beings whose eyes say: "Protect me!" even in the midst of her languorous coquetries. And very evidently Zénaïde understood how to defend her.

Jack had felt from the first that these two women

shared some secret in common. He knew not which of them he loved most. Zénaïde's gayety, which sprang from the bravery and tranquillity of her soul, charmed him, while Madame Roudic's less transparent but more charming femininity delighted his eyes, his instincts, accustomed in former days to elegance. It seemed to him that she resembled his mother. Yet Ida was a very different creature, lively, talkative, full of spirits, while this woman was a silent dreamer, one of those beings whose thoughts are all the more active because they are imprisoned in a body that finds nothing to occupy it. Their features, their walk had nothing in common, even the color of their hair was unlike. Notwithstanding, they resembled each other, and it was a resemblance of the most intimate sort, such as results from the same perfume lingering about the gown, the same chance arrangement of the folds of a dress, and some still subtler resemblance that only a skilled chemist of the human soul could have analyzed.

With Clarisse and Zénaïde the apprentice felt himself more at home than with Roudic. There came to him a sense of protection, for they had that refinement and polish which in the working-classes elevates mother and daughter above father and brother. He would often read to them of a Sunday, when the weather hindered his going out.

The readings were given in the parlor on the lower floor, a big room decorated with marine charts hanging upon the walls, and a highly colored view of Naples, enormous shells, hardened sponges,

little dried sea-horses, in short all those exotic accessories which, owing to the neighborhood of the sea, and the arrival of vessels, soon collect in those modest interiors. Handmade tidies were upon each piece of furniture, a sofa and an arm-chair upholstered in Utrecht velvet completed this somewhat luxurious condition of things. The arm-chair was Father Roudic's especial delight. He settled himself comfortably in it to listen to the reading, while Clarisse remained in her usual place near the window, her air expectant but melancholy, and Zénaïde to whom the needs of the household were above all religious considerations, took advantage of the Sabbath where no one had to work, to put all the family linen in order, including the blue overalls of the apprentice.

Jack would come down from his attic with one of the doctor's books, and the reading began.

After the first few lines, honest Roudic's eyes would blink, then open enormously, and at last, exhausted by this effort, they would shut fast.

He tried despairingly to conquer that sleepiness which overcame him when, no longer at work, he was comfortably seated in his arm-chair, a position that was always a strange one to him, but his desire to fall asleep was heightened by the softness of that arm-chair. He was ashamed on his wife's account, and from time to time, disturbed by that idea, he would talk aloud as if in a dream, to show every one that he was not asleep, but listening. He had even adopted a word to express this simulated attention, a half articulate "Astounding!"

which he interpolated during the most commonplace passages, revealing all the more plainly how far away his mind had been.

It must be admitted that those old books with which Monsieur Rivals had crammed Jack's box, were neither very amusing nor easy to understand. There were translations of the ancient poets, Seneca's *Letters*, Plutarch's *Lives*, Dante, Virgil, and Homer, a few books of history, and that was all. Often the child had not the slightest idea of what he was reading, but he kept at work enthusiastically, spurred on by the thought that these books would keep him from sinking too low, to the level of all that surrounded him. He read on courageously, piously, always hoping to catch a glimpse of some ray of light between the obscure lines, with all the fervor of some unlettered devotee following the mass in Latin.

His favorite of all, the book he read most frequently, was Dante's *Inferno*. He was impressed by the description of all those tortures. In his childish imagination it was blended with the spectacle he had every day before his eyes. Those half-naked men, the flames, the great sluices of the iron works through which the molten metal flowed on like some great artery, all these things he saw pass in the strophes of the poet, and the groaning, rushing sounds of the steam, the grinding of the gigantic saws, the dull blows of the steam-hammer, re-echoing through those glowing halls, lent them, for his childish mind, some fancied resemblance to the circles of the *Inferno*.

One Sunday Jack was reading to the usual audience a passage of his favorite poem. Father Roudic had fallen asleep as was his habit after the first few lines, his mouth still retaining that expression of good-natured interest which he had learned so well to assume that it permitted him to say without waking: "It's astounding!" The two women, however, followed the reading with profound attention, and impressions that were very different.

It was the episode of Francesca di Rimini.

> "No greater grief than to remember joy
> Through evil days and drear."

While the apprentice read, Clarisse listened with bowed head and shuddered. Zénaïde, with frowning brows, sat bolt upright in her chair, sewing with furious zeal.

That sonorous verse, penetrating the stillness of this humble working man's home, seemed as far as the heavens above it, its impressions, occupations, and commonplace existence; yet that strain of music, as it passed, stirred a world of thought, touched those hearts, and like an all-powerful flash of lightning seemed charged with a dangerous electricity, capricious and strange.

Madame Roudic's tears flowed as she listened to the story of that unhappy love. Without noticing that her stepmother was crying, Zénaïde, when the passage was ended, spoke the first word.

"What a shameless, wicked woman! to dare to tell the story of her crime, and boast of it!"

"True, she was very guilty," answered Clarisse, "but she was most unhappy."

"She unhappy? Don't tell me that, mamma, one would almost think you pitied this Francesca, who loved her husband's brother."

"But, my child, she loved him before her marriage, and they had married her by force to one she did not care for."

"By force or not, once she had married him, she should have been faithful to him. The book says he was old, but that seems to me all the more reason for respecting him, to keep him from being the laughing-stock of his neighbors. I think the old man did right to kill them both! They got just what they deserved."

She spoke with terrible earnestness, her sense of filial affection and womanly honor outraged, and she spoke with that cruel frankness of youth which judges all action by a preconceived ideal that neither foresight nor knowledge has formed.

Clarisse made no reply. She had raised the curtain, and looked out. Roudic, half-awakened, opened his eyes long enough to murmur, "'Ssstounding!" Jack, his eyes fixed upon the book, thought as in a dream of what he had just read, and the stormy discussion which the reading had called forth. Thus in this humble and ignorant circle, separated by a distance of four hundred years from that immortal legend of an adulterous love, read by a child who scarcely comprehended what it meant, the legend found an unexpected echo. And herein lies the true grandeur

and power of a poet; in the story of one human being, he appeals to the universal; his light endures and seems to follow each wayfarer upon the path of life, as the moon, on a calm night, appears to rise from all parts of the heaven at once, shining with tender pity, with friendly gaze, upon all the lonely and lost, shedding her radiance upon all, knowing neither haste nor weariness.

"This time I am sure! It is he," cried Jack, suddenly springing from his chair.

Through the little industrial street a shadow was seen passing the windows, uttering a cry quite familiar to the apprentice:

"Hats to sell! Hats to sell!"

He rushed out in great haste, but Clarisse had already preceded him in the street. She passed him as she was returning, her face overspread with red, crumpling a letter in her pocket.

The peddler had gone some little distance in spite of his terribly awkward gait, and the enormous load of caps, surouâs and felt hats, which bent him nearly double, for his winter cargo was much heavier than that he carried in summer. He was just turning the corner of the quay when Jack cried:

"Hi, Bélisaire!"

The other turned around, his face lighted up by a genial smile.

"I was sure it was you. So you are here too, Bélisaire?"

"Yes, Master Jack. My father wanted me to remain at Nantes on account of my sister, whose

husband is ill. So there I stayed. In the daytime I make trips wherever I can, to Châtenay, Basse-Indre, and other places. But I sell most at Indret. Then I sometimes am employed upon errands for Nantes and Saint Nazaire," he added with a wink in the direction of Roudic's house, which was at some little distance from where they stood talking.

Bélisaire on the whole was contented. He had sent all his money to Paris for his old father and the children. His brother-in-law's illness had cost him a good deal, but with hard work, all that would come out right, and if it were not for those infernal shoes of his —

"Then they still hurt you?" asked Jack.

"Oh yes, always! You see to have an easy pair, they would have to be made according to measure, and that would cost too much; that sort of thing is for rich people."

After having spoken of himself, Bélisaire hesitated a moment, and then it was his turn to question.

"What has happened, Monsieur Jack, and why is it you are now a workman? It was very pretty, that snug little house in the country."

The apprentice scarcely knew how to answer. He blushed for his smock, though it was put on fresh that morning, blushed for his blackened hands. The peddler, noting his embarrassment, changed the subject by remarking:

"That was a fine leg of ham, was n't it! And the lovely lady who looked so kind — how is she?

That was your mother, was n't it? You look like her!"

Jack was so happy to hear some one speak of his mother that he could have remained there all night, but Bélisaire had not the time. He was in haste to carry a very important letter that had just been given him. More winking in the direction of the same window! He must be off!

They shook hands warmly, and the peddler went off, bent and limping, raising his feet as he walked, like a blind horse. And Jack's eyes followed him affectionately, as if he saw the Corbeil road with its fringe of forest stretch its white length beneath the tired feet of that wandering peddler.

When the apprentice returned, Madame Roudic, very pale, was waiting for him at the door.

"Jack," she said in a low voice, her lips trembling, "what did that man say to you?"

He answered that they had known each other at Étiolles, and had been speaking together about his relatives.

She gave a sigh of relief. But the rest of the evening she was dreamier even than usual; her clinging attitude, as she sat in her chair was more helpless, more dependent than ever, and it seemed that to the weight of her fair hair was added a heavier weight, the burden of some terrible remorse.

III.

THE MACHINES.

CHÂTEAU DES AULNETTES,
ÉTIOLLES.

I am vexed with you, my dear child. Monsieur Roudic has just written his brother a long letter about you, and while he praises your gentleness, your sweet disposition in the strongest terms, he declares that in a whole year's time you have not made the least progress at Indret, and that you certainly lack the slightest aptitude for iron-work. You can imagine the anxiety this causes us. If with all the excellent disposition these people have discovered in you, you do not succeed any better, the reason must be that you do not work, and this lack of willingness surprises and grieves us.

Our friends are much vexed at this state of affairs, and every day I have the sorrow of hearing my child spoken of in very painful terms. Monsieur Roudic says in his letter that the air of the shop does not agree with you, that you cough a great deal, are wretchedly pale and thin, and that every one is ashamed to give you anything to do, because the perspiration rolls from your forehead at the slightest exertion. For my own part, I am unable to understand such weakness in one whom everybody thought so robust. Of course I will not go as far as to say, with the others, that laziness is the cause, or that craving for pity, which is so com-

mon in children. I know my Jack, and that he is incapable of deceit. But I am afraid that he is imprudent, that he goes out nights without wrapping himself up warmly enough, that he forgets to close his window, forgets to put round his neck the muffler I sent him. That is very wrong, my child. Above all things you must care for your health. Remember that you have need of all your strength to accomplish your work successfully. Take good care of yourself, and your work will go well.

I can understand that your work is not always agreeable to you, that it would be much pleasanter to be roaming through the forest with the keeper, but remember what Monsieur d'Argenton said to you, "Life is not a romance." And he should know something about it, poor darling, for life has been a hard enough struggle for him, and his profession is more terrible than yours.

If you could know the vulgar jealousies, the petty conspiracies aimed at this great poet; they are afraid of his genius, they would hinder him from producing anything. Just imagine what happened a short while ago at the Théâtre Français. They received a play that is unquestionably his *Daughter of Faust*, of which you surely have heard us speak. Of course they could not steal the entire play, for he has never written it, but his idea, his title! Whom can we suspect? He is surrounded by faithful friends. For a moment we thought of Mother Archambauld, for she is always listening and watching the keyholes with her ferret-like eyes. But how could she ever have managed to remember the plot of the play, and repeat it to interested parties, when she scarcely knows a word of French?

However that may be, our friend is greatly affected by

this last piece of treachery. He has had lately as many as three of his former attacks daily. I must add that Monsieur Hirsch has been absolute devotion itself to him through all this, and it is fortunate we have him so near, for Monsieur Rivals continues to sulk at us. Would you believe that he has not called a single time to ask for news of our poor invalid? and *à propos*, my dear child, I want to say one thing to you. We have heard that you are keeping up a steady correspondence with the doctor and little Cécile, and I must warn you that Monsieur d'Argenton does not regard this in a favorable light. Monsieur Rivals may be an excellent man, but his mind is given over to routine, he is far behind the times, and he even tried quite boldly to deter you from the life that is manifestly your vocation. And besides, my child, we should, in general, cultivate relations with people in our own sphere, our own walk in life. Any other course brings discouragement, all sorts of chimerical aspirations which lead to a nondescript existence.

As to your liking for little Cécile, Monsieur d'Argenton thinks again, and I am of his opinion, that it is one of those childish attachments which ought not to last long, for it might be a serious inconvenience in later life, weaken your nature and turn you from the true and strait path. You will act wisely in breaking off relations that cannot be other than harmful to you, and which perhaps have not a little to do with the singular apathy you show for a career upon which you entered with so much ardor and good-will. I trust you understand, my child, that I am speaking merely in your own interest. Remember that you will soon be fifteen years old, that you hold in your own hands an excellent trade

that can open the future for you, and do not give any one just cause for predicting that you will never be fit for anything.

Your loving mother,

CHARLOTTE.

Postscript. Ten o'clock, P. M. — My dear, — the gentlemen have just gone upstairs. I take this moment to add one little word of good-night to my letter, to speak to you just as I should if you were here at my side. Do not be discouraged, and above all, don't oppose him. You know how he is — very kind, but inexorable. He is determined you shall be a workman, and a workman you must be. Nothing you might say could have any effect, for his mind is made up on that subject. Is it just? I cannot say. My head is turned with all the things I hear in this place. One thing, however, is certain. You must not be ill. Take good care of your health, Jack, I beg of you. Wrap yourself up if you go out of an evening. It must be quite damp on that island; avoid the fog, and send to me in care of the Archambaulds if you need anything. Is there any of your chocolate left to nibble in the morning when you wake? For that and other little things I manage to lay aside a little of my allowance each month. Just think, you have made me economical! But work, work always. Remember that a day will come, perhaps it is not far away, when your mother will have only your arm to lean upon.

If you could know how sad I am sometimes when I think of the future. And besides, life is not very gay here, especially since this last affair. I am not happy always. Oh well! You know how it is with me, sorrow

never lasts very long. I laugh and cry at the same moment, though I never know how I can. Besides it would be very wrong of me to complain. He is nervous as all artists are, but you would never imagine how much generosity and greatness his nature has at heart. Adieu, my darling. I must end my letter, so that Mother Archambauld may post it on her way home. I am afraid we shall not have the good creature with us much longer. Monsieur d'Argenton mistrusts her. He believes that she is in the pay of his enemies, to steal from him the subjects of his books and plays. It appears this has happened already more than once. I kiss you, and send you much love, my beloved Jack. All these little dots are the kisses I send you.

Behind these numerous pages Jack plainly saw two faces, one was that of d'Argenton, dogmatic, dictatorial — the other that of his mother restored to her real self, and pressing him to her heart even at a distance, deluging him with caresses. That the poor woman was oppressed could be felt plainly enough. How all that expansive nature of hers had been stifled! As the child's imagination readily translates all its thoughts into pictures, it seemed to Jack, as he read, that his Ida — for to him she was always Ida — shut up in the turret of *Parva domus*, was making signs of distress to him, calling him to her aid as a deliverer.

Oh yes! he would work — he would conquer his repugnance, become a good workman, labor steadfastly, and earn his living that he might get his mother away from that place, rescue her from such tyranny. And first of all he put away all his

books, poets, historians, philosophers, in Monsieur Rivals' box, and for fear of temptation he nailed up the box. He did not wish to read, for it set his mind wandering upon by-roads. He desired to husband all his strength, keep all his thoughts for the one end his mother had pointed out to him.

"You are right, youngster," said Roudic to him; "books merely furnish your brain with all sorts of tomfoolery, and that distracts you from work. In our business you don't need to know so very much, and since you are glad and ready to learn, this is what I propose. I am working over-time now, even on Sundays. If you choose, you may come with me; and while at work, I will teach you how to dress iron. Perhaps I shall be more patient than Lebescam, and may be more successful."

From that day he did as he had proposed. Directly after dinner, the fitter, who had special work to perform, took the boy off with him to the deserted shop, which with the fires gone down, seemed as if silently gathering up its forces for the labor of a new day. A small lamp placed upon a bench was the only light Roudic had upon his work. The rest of the workshop was plunged into those fantastic shadows by which the moon dimly suggests the shape of objects without giving them definite outline. All along the walls where the tools were hung, sharp projections and jagged, saw-like outlines appeared. The lathes were arranged in long rows. Cords, cranks, bobbins, stopped and motionless intersected each other, while shavings of metal that had been filed, glittered upon the ground,

crackling under the foot, as if bearing witness that another piece of work had just been completed.

Father Roudic, bent, absorbed in what he was doing, handled his minute tools, his eyes fixed from time to time upon a chronometric needle. No sound was heard save the humming of the lathe set in motion by the treadles and the sharp sound of the water falling drop by drop upon the wheel, turning with lightning rapidity. Standing near the foreman, Jack busied himself, trying to file, exerting all his strength, and trying to take pleasure in his work. But most decidedly he lacked the least bent for it.

"It 's no use, my poor little fellow," said Father Roudic. "You have n't the least turn for filing."

Yet the poor little fellow was doing his utmost and never rested for a moment. Sometimes of a Sunday the foreman would take him all over the works, explaining to him the mechanisms of all those powerful machines, whose names were as barbarous, as complex as their physiognomies.

"Machine used to drill holes for winches."

"Machines used to cut mortises in the heads of connecting-rods."

Bit by bit, with the greatest enthusiasm Roudic explained to him all that gearing of wheels, saws, gigantic screws, made him admire the marvellous adjustment of the innumerable and separate parts which united to form one complete whole. Of all these explanations Jack remembered nothing but a name here and there, words which sounded as cruelly in his ears as some surgeon's terms and

made him think of some formidable trepan whose interminable screw was grinding, grinding into his very brain. He had not yet been able to conquer the terror which had been inspired in him by all the unconscious, pitiless, brute forces to which he had been delivered. Set in motion by steam, they seemed to him the personification of malevolent beasts lying in wait for him as he passed, and ready to seize him, rend, cut him in pieces. Cold and motionless, they seemed to him still more menacing, as they stood with gaping jaws, their claws extended, all their instruments of destruction motionless, concealed, they wore an air of glutted, satiated cruelty. But on one occasion he witnessed an impressive ceremony which made him comprehend better than all Father Roudic's explanations, that these things possessed a grandeur and a beauty of their own.

There had just been completed for a government gunboat, a superb steam-engine of one-thousand-horse power. It had remained for some time in the fitters' shop, occupying the whole rear, and surrounded by a crowd of workmen; it stood erect, complete in all its parts, though not quite finished. Often as he passed, Jack would look through the windows at it, for no one was permitted to enter the shop except the fitters themselves. As soon as finished, the apparatus was to be sent to Saint-Nazaire, and what contributed to the beauty and rarity of this occasion was the fact that in spite of its enormous weight and the complexity of its workmanship, the engineers of Indret

had decided to embark the entire mechanism, set up. This audacious enterprise was made practicable by the formidable steam-crane at the disposal of the iron works. From day to day it was said "To-morrow is the day," but at the last moment there was always some detail that must be attended to, something that must be repaired or perfected. But at last all was in readiness, and the order for embarking the machine was given.

It was a joyous day for Indret. At one o'clock, all the workshops closed, houses and streets were deserted. Men, women, and children, every living creature on the island, was eager to see this machine leave the fitters' room, descend to the Loire, and be put aboard the transport that was to bear it away. Long before the great door was open, a crowd had gathered outside the shop, tumultuous, expectant, and uproarious, a holiday-crowd. At last the sliding-doors of the shop were thrown open, and from the shadow in the rear all could see an enormous mass advancing slowly, heavily, borne upon a movable platform which was to serve later as a fulcrum, in removing the engine, at present moved along the rails by steam-tackle.

When the mechanism appeared in the light of day, gleaming, solid, and magnificent, it was hailed with loud acclamations.

It paused a moment, as if to take breath, and to allow itself to be admired in the sunshine, which made it resplendent. Among the two thousand workmen of the town there was perhaps not one who had not aided in the great work according to

his skill and his strength. But they had worked in isolation, each one by himself, groping his way almost as the soldier fights during the battle, lost in the crowd and its din, firing straight ahead ignorant of the effect or the use of what he does, enveloped in a cloud of blinding red smoke, which hinders him from seeing anything except in that corner where he happens to be.

And now they saw their machine, standing before them, complete, all its parts fitted together. And proud they were of it! In a moment they surrounded it, saluting it with joyous laughter and triumphant cries. They admired it as connoisseurs, stroked it with their big rough hands, caressed it, talked to it in their own rude dialect: "Well, old girl, how goes it?" The founders pointed with pride to the enormous screws of bronze, saying: "We cast them!" The smiths replied, "But it was we who worked the iron, and mixed it with drops of our sweat." And the braziers and riveters, not without justice, sang the praises of the huge boiler coated with red lead like a fighting elephant. If these boasted of the metal work itself, the engineers, designers, and fitters prided themselves just as much upon the form the whole had taken, and even our friend Jack remarked as he looked at his hands, "Ah, you old jade, many a blister you 've given me!"

To separate this mad crowd of fanatics, as enthusiastic as some Hindoo population celebrating the feast of its Juggernaut, a crowd which the brutal idol could easily have crushed as it passed on, it

was almost necessary to use force. The overseers ran about in every direction, shoving quite freely, to keep the way clear, and at last there remained about the machinery not more than three hundred workmen, chosen from all the shops for their strength; armed with handspikes, or hanging on to huge chains, they waited a signal to set the monster in motion.

"Are you ready, boys? Hoist her!"

Then the sharp, quick notes of a fife were heard, and the great machinery began to move upon the rails, that mass of bronze, copper, and steel sparkling in the light, its gearing of beams, connecting-rods, and pistons feeling a metallic shock. And as if this were some completed monument the workman must abandon, they crowned its very top with an immense bunch of foliage, lending to man's labor the added grace of nature's smile, and while at its base this enormous mass of metal moved on slowly, with difficulty, above, that verdurous plume fluttered, nodded, and waved at every step, rustling softly in the pure air. On each side it was escorted by a crowd, manager, overseers, apprentices, workmen, marching pell-mell, their eyes fixed upon the machinery, the indefatigable fifer guiding them on towards the river, where a wreath of smoke ascended from a steam-launch which lay level with the quay, and ready to start.

And now the machine lies directly under the crane, the enormous steam-crane of the iron works of Indret, the most powerful lever in the world. Two men have mounted upon the train which is to

be raised with the machine by the aid of iron cables fastened above the bunch of green by an enormous iron ring forged in a single piece. The steam whistles, the fife redoubles its shrill notes hurried and joyous and encouraging now, the jib of the crane is lowered like the long neck of a bird, seizes the machine in its curved beak and raises it slowly, very slowly, with a gradual jerking motion. At this moment it is suspended in air just over the crowd, the iron works, and all Indret. Every one can see it and admire it at his ease. In the golden sunlight where it hovers, it seems to pause and say farewell to all the shops that gave it life, movement and speech, — the places which it will never see again. For their part the workmen, as they contemplate it, feel the satisfaction of looking upon a piece of work that is finished, that strange almost divine emotion which in a single moment repays for the efforts of an entire year, and crowns every hardship with the pride of having conquered each difficulty.

"Ah, but that is a piece of work!" murmured old Roudic solemnly, still trembling from the effort of hauling, and wiping from his eyes the great tears of admiration that blinded him. The exciting music of the fife had not ceased. But the crane began to turn, to bend towards the water-side that it might deposit its burden upon the impatient launch.

Suddenly a dull crack was heard, followed by a piercing and awful cry that found an echo in every breast. By the thrill which passed through the air,

all recognized the unexpected, unforeseen presence of death, death which had with a mighty and violent hand forced a way for itself even among the living. For a moment there was an indescribable tumult and terror. What had happened? One of the supporting chains had been suddenly drawn tight in descending, and between this and the hard metal of the machine, one of the workmen who had ascended the platform, had been caught. "Quick, quick, boys!" came the cry, "Reverse the engine." But all their efforts to rescue the unfortunate man from that horrible brute were quite unavailing; all was over. Every head was uplifted, every arm outstretched in one supreme malediction. Women as they wept, covered their eyes with their shawls, or the strings of their caps, that they might not see those shapeless remains which men were bearing upon a stretcher. The man had been crushed, cut in two. His blood, streaming forth violently, had gushed upon the steel, the copper, and even upon the tuft of green. No more of the fife, no more shouting. The last evolution of the machine was completed amid a sinister silence, while a group turned in the direction of the town, the bearers, the women, all that agonized company.

Now fear is in all eyes. The work has become formidable. It has been baptized in blood, has turned its might against those who had given it. There is a sigh of relief when the monster is at last safe upon the launch, which sinks for a moment beneath its weight, and sends out two or three

great waves that almost reach the banks. "How heavy it is!" Yes, heavy indeed! The men look at each other, and shudder.

At last it is aboard with its propeller shaft, its boilers beside it. The blood that stained it has been hastily wiped up, it has regained its first splendor, but not its inert impassibility. It seems to be armed, and full of life. Erect and proud, upon the deck of the vessel that is carrying it, which it almost seems to bear away, it hastens towards the sea, as if it longed to devour coal and space, and put its column of smoke where at this moment it flutters merely a bunch of green. It is such a magnificent object that the workmen of Indret have forgotten its crime, and, greeting its departure with one last ringing Hurrah! they follow it lovingly with their eyes.

Ah well! speed on, thou monster, across the world. Follow undeviatingly the path laid out for thee, braving wind and sea and storm. Man has made thee so strong that thou hast nothing to fear. But be not cruel as thou art strong. Control that terrible power already put to the test. Direct the vessel without wrath, and, above all, respect human life, if thou wouldst do honor to the iron works of Indret.

That night there was the sound of carousing and merry-making from one end to the other of the island. Though the accident of the afternoon had lessened enthusiasm somewhat, every home wished to enjoy the festivities already planned. It was no longer an island of toil, panting and breathless,

ready to fall asleep almost as soon as night had come. Everywhere, even in the sombre Château, songs were heard, and the clinking of glasses from behind the lighted windows whose radiance mingled in the Loire with the gleam of the stars. At the Roudics', all the master-hands of the shop, a whole troop of friends, were gathered around the long table. At first every one talked of the accident. The children were not old enough to go to work, and the manager had promised a pension to the widow. But the machine itself was the real subject of interest in every one's thoughts. That one idea that had absorbed them for so many months was only a memory now. They recalled various episodes in its history, the difficulties of the work itself, and it was well worth while to hear Lebescam, the hairy giant, tell how unyielding the metal had been, — and the difficulty they had experienced in making it malleable in forging it.

"I saw that it was n't welding right. 'Come now,' I said to the boys, 'at it there, good straight whacks! At it, comrades, follow my lead, and be quick about it!'"

He fancied it was all to do over again. His clenched fists descended upon the table and made it tremble. The others nodded their heads approvingly. Jack for the first time listened with real interest. He was like a conscript among veterans, and it may well be believed that all these tales of hardships made every throat terribly dry, and that the talk could not have gone on without many a round, many a bumper. At last they

began to sing, for they always wind up that way, when there are enough to attack the chorus of *Towards the shores of France.*

And Jack added his to all these discordant voices, repeating with the others,

> "Voui, voui,
> Voguons en chantant."

If his kind friends at Les Aulnettes could have seen him then, they would have been quite satisfied with him. Bronzed by the open air and the heat of the forge, the blisters on his hands cicatrized in thick callouses, he seemed quite a part of the gathering, as he drawled out the vulgar refrain,— he was a genuine working man now. And Lebescam remarked to Father Roudic:

"Well, at last that apprentice of yours has dropped his airs. He 's beginning to keep step with the others, by thunder!"

IV.

ZÉNAÏDE'S DOWRY.

In the shop Jack had heard the men indulge in many a laugh among themselves at the expense of the Roudic household. The affair between Clarisse and the Nantais was no longer a secret for any one; and in separating them, the director had, unsuspectingly, made the scandal more flagrant, the woman's fall irreparable. While her nephew had remained at Indret, protected against herself by the honesty of her surroundings, respect for the home of her husband, where their relationship was more evident, and added a still more odious appearance to her fault, Clarisse had been able to resist the tender advances of the handsome designer. But since he had been at Saint-Nazaire, where the manager prolonged his stay from month to month, the aspect of affairs had changed. First they had exchanged letters, later they had met each other.

From Saint-Nazaire to Basse-Indre is only a two hours' journey and Basse-Indre is separated from Indret only by an arm of the Loire. At Basse-Indre they met. The Nantais, who did not find the Transatlantic's regulations quite so inflexible as those of the iron works, left work when he chose, and Clarisse, for her part, when she wanted

to cross the river, could do so on the pretext of purchasing provisions which could not be obtained upon the island. They had hired a room in a wayside inn, slightly out of the village. Every one in Indret knew of their intrigue, talked of it openly, and when Clarisse passed along the main street towards the quay, during working hours, in the midst of the din of the workshops, while the lowered flag protected her from her husband's eyes, she detected many a smile on the faces of the men she met, whether workmen or overseers, and a bolder familiarity in their manner of greeting her than of old. At the threshold of a door left open for a moment or behind a curtain drawn back for more light upon some household duty, ironing or sewing, hostile faces and watchful eyes were spying at her. And as she passed she heard them whisper upon the steps, "There she goes! there she goes!"

Alas, yes! she obeyed an impulse stronger than herself, and she went. She went, although the scorn of every one went with her, although she was overwhelmed with shame and fear, her eyes fixed upon the ground, the perspiration standing upon her temples, her face covered with blushes that the cool breezes of the Loire could not banish. But still she went. These indolent natures are terrible at times.

Jack knew all about this. The time had gone by when he and little Mâdou had puzzled their brains over the meaning of that word *cocotte*. The workshop soon opens a child's eyes, and even

corrupts them. And workmen were not at all squeamish about calling a spade a spade, even before him, and they distinguished the two Roudics among themselves as "Roudic the singer," and "Roudic the ——." And they laughed at it all, for among the people, shame of that sort creates merriment. The old Gallic blood will have it so.

But Jack did not laugh. He pitied from his heart that poor, blind, simple-hearted fool of a husband. He pitied too that woman, whose weakness and indolence were revealed even in the way she twisted her hair, let her hands fall, and in her absorbed and silent air that seemed a perpetual request for forgiveness. He longed to say to her, "Look out! you are watched! And as to that tall, curled Nantais, he longed to get him in a corner once, to have reached the stature of a man just to shake him well, shame him, and tell him: "Off with you! and leave that woman in peace!"

But what roused his keenest indignation was that his old friend Bélisaire should have a hand in all this vile business. The peddler, whose calling compelled him to be always on the road, served as a halting messenger for the two culprits, who were generous, as two lovers are apt to be. Many a time the apprentice had surprised him sliding letters under Madame Roudic's apron, in exchange for money, and he was so shocked to see his friend playing such a part in this hideous treachery, that for some time he had avoided any meeting with Bélisaire, and never stopped to talk with him.

All in vain did the other grimace, smile his most amiable smile, talk of a certain lovely lady, of that famous leg of ham, — the magic charm worked no longer. "Good day, good day," was Jack's only reply, or, "I 've no time to stop to-day," and he passed on, leaving the peddler in open-mouthed amazement.

Bélisaire was far from guessing the real cause of this coldness. He suspected it so little, that one day, intrusted with a hasty message for Clarisse, and not finding her at home, he waited until the men left their work and offered the letter to the apprentice with an air of great mystery.

"It 's for Madame Roudic! Ssh! Give it to nobody but her."

Jack had recognized the handwriting of the Nantais upon the blue envelope sealed with a little wax. Then that fellow was over there at the inn, and expecting her.

"Not I," said the apprentice, thrusting the letter away from him, "I 'll not deliver that message, and if I were in your place, I 'd rather sell hats than profit by such a bad business as that."

Bélisaire gazed at him, dumfounded.

"For you know well enough," added Jack, "what is in those letters you carry back and forth. You know as well as every one else. And do you think it 's honest on your part to help deceive that good man?"

The peddler's ashen face grew suddenly purple.

"That 's rather a hard speech, Master Jack. I have never deceived any one, and those who know

Bélisaire can tell you so. I have been given letters to carry, and I carry them, that is all! These are my little perquisites, and with so many of us at home, I have no right to refuse such. Just remember — I have an old man to look after, who does not work, children to bring up, my sister's husband is sick — all that is no joke, is it now? And money is not earned too easily. When I think that in all the time I have been on the tramp, I've never yet been able to get a pair of shoes to fit me, and must stump over the roads in these, that is what bothers me. Surely if I had wished to deceive people, I'd be richer than I am to-day."

His air was so honest, so convincing as he spoke, that it was impossible to be displeased with him. Jack tried to make him understand why he was in the wrong. Time wasted! "His little perquisites; the children's mouths must be fed; the old man did not work any longer," these arguments were strong enough to convince Bélisaire; he did not need to seek for others.

He was honest, but his honesty had not taught him to make delicate distinctions; he was of the common people, who only in rare exceptions disturb themselves with nicer shades of feeling, and conscientious scruples, an exception occurring like some rare flower among rustic plants, conveyed there by some accident of wind or soil.

"I am one of these people now," Jack suddenly thought, looking at his blouse. Tears sprang to his eyes at that idea. He extended his hand to Bélisaire in silence, and withdrew without a word.

That Father Roudic should have known nothing whatever of all that was passing about him, was not strange, for his whole life was spent in the workshop, surrounded by men who respected his blind confidence, so full of tenderness and simplicity. But Zénaïde, of what was Zénaïde thinking? Where was she all this time? Had Argus lost its eyes? Zénaïde was there, on the contrary, at home more than ever, for during the past month she did not go out working. Her keen, kindly eyes were wide open; they had acquired a certain sparkle, a vivacity. Those eyes said in a language of their own, for eyes can speak when they are very happy:

"Zénaïde is going to be married."

They did not say it merely, they actually sang: "Zénaïde is going to be married. Zénaïde has an intended!" And a charming intended he was, a brigadier in the custom-house, in a snug fitting uniform of green, a bellicose-looking little moustache, and a braided képé perched nattily upon his head. In all the port of Nantes, which is quite a big place, there is no lack of custom-house officers, but there could not have been found there another brigadier like Brigadier Mangin. No, there was only one Mangin, and Zénaïde was to have him all for herself. It is true, he cost a good deal, at least he would cost Papa Roudic a good deal. Seven thousand francs in gold and bank-notes, which the good man had been collecting sou by sou, for twenty years. The brigadier could not be brought to terms for less. On

these conditions he was ready to discover in Zénaïde the most regular features, the slenderest figure, and to give her the preference over all the grisettes of Nantes, the charming salt-workers of Noirmoutiers and Bourg-de-Batz, who courted him assiduously, when they brought their salt to the customs. Father Roudic thought these terms a trifle severe. They would devour all his savings for twenty years. And if he should die, what would become of Clarisse? And if he should have any more children himself? But his wife at this turn of affairs behaved most generously.

"Pshaw! what does it matter?" she exclaimed, "you are still young. You will be able to work for many years yet. We will economize. Give her her brigadier. You can see that she dotes upon him."

In love herself, she understood the tender passion in another.

Since the possibility of becoming Madame Mangin, and locking arms for life with the irresistible brigadier, had dawned upon her, Zénaïde had forgotten how to eat and drink. She, who had formerly been so practical, was now absorbed in endless reveries and contemplation, spent whole hours before her glass, gazing at her own image, beautifying herself; suddenly making a wry face full of comic despair, she would say, for the poor girl had no illusions concerning herself:

"I know I am ugly, and that Monsieur Mangin is not choosing me for my beautiful eyes. But

that's nothing. Once he has taken me, I can make him love me afterwards."

And the honest creature gave a little toss of the head, a smile of internal approval, for none knew better than herself the wealth of tenderness, patience, and abnegation in store for him whose resting-place would be her heart. The thought of this marriage, the first anguish of uncertainty, her joy at learning it was a settled thing and the date set, all these events had caused her to relax her active vigilance. Moreover, the Nantais was no longer at Indret, and Clarisse in all this matter had shown herself so kindly that Zénaïde's suspicions were somewhat allayed. Can it be wondered at! She was a daughter, but she was also a woman. Sometimes as she worked upon her trousseau, her wedding-gown which she was making herself, yielding to a sudden impulse of gratitude, she would drop her thimble, her scissors, and dart through the snowy fabrics piled about her, with an exclamation: "Oh, mamma, mamma!" and kiss Clarisse, press her to her breast at the risk of pricking her stepmother, for Zénaïde's dress was covered thicker than ever with pins, in this terrible demand upon all her talents as dressmaker. She did not notice the pallor of Clarisse, nor her confusion. She did not observe that the young woman's hands, when they met her own, cool virgin ones, were burning with fever. She did not remark those long and frequent absences, heard not a word of all that was being said on the main street of Indret. She could see

and hear nothing, absorbed with her own happiness, living in a state of joyous exaltation, and intoxicated with her own impatience.

The banns had already been published the first time, the marriage was fixed for a fortnight later and at all hours the little cottage of the Roudics was full of that joyous tumult and excitement that precedes a wedding. There was a constant coming and going, the sound of doors opening and shutting. At least ten times a day, Zénaïde went up and down the little wooden stairway, with bounds like those of a young hippopotamus. And there was the chattering of friends and neighbors, the trying on of dresses, the arrival of presents. The future bride received many a gift, for this big girl in spite of her somewhat curt manners, had found the way of making herself beloved by all.

Jack, too, was counting upon making her a little gift upon the occasion of her marriage. His mother had sent him a hundred francs saved laboriously from the meagre allowance given her for dress, no easy matter since the poet himself verified every account.

"This money is your very own, my Jack," Charlotte wrote, "I laid it aside especially for you. I wish that you should make a suitable figure at this ceremony, and your wardrobe too must be in a dreadful state, if, as you write me, your English costume can no longer be worn. Try to look your best and enjoy yourself. But do not mention my sending this in your letters. And say nothing about it to the Roudics. They would write to

thank me and that might occasion serious trouble for me. He is suffering at present from extreme nervous sensibility. He works too hard, poor darling, and besides, he has suffered so much from his enemies.

"They are all persecuting him, trying to hinder every success of his. It is understood, then, is it not? There is to be no mention of the hundred francs coming from me. Let it be supposed that they are your small savings."

For two whole days Jack had felt quite proud to have all that money in his pocket. These gold pieces actually made him walk more erectly, gave a joyous spring, a certain aplomb to his steps. It was as good as a feast to him to think of having new clothing that would fit him, and not that dreadful worn-out smock that had been washed so often.

But to get it he would have to go to Nantes, and he awaited the coming Sunday impatiently. To go to Nantes! That meant another holiday. And what delighted him most of all was to think that he owed all of these pleasures to his mother. But one thing perplexed him, and that was the choice of a wedding-gift for Zénaïde. What should one give a young girl who is going to be married? How could he give her what would surely please her, guess what was still wanting among the avalanche of trinkets and finery that is heaped upon a bride, as if a definitive adieu to all the childishness, the coquetries of her girlhood. He must discover what she already had.

Returning from work one winter evening, Jack had this thought in mind as he entered the Roudics'. It was very dark that evening. Near the house he ran against some one who was running along, keeping close to the wall.

"Is that you, Bélisaire?"

There was no reply, but as he pushed open the door, the apprentice saw at once that he had not been mistaken. Clarisse was standing in the entry, her hair disordered by the wind, her face white with the cold that struck her from the street, and so absent-minded, that, even before Jack, she continued to read the letter she held in her hand, by the slender ray of light that came from the parlor. Surely that letter must have contained extraordinary news. Then Jack remembered that during the day he had heard in the shop that the Nantais had just lost a large sum at play with some engineers of an English vessel just arrived from Calcutta. And this time every one was asking how he was going to manage to square things, and whether he would not go all to pieces at this last blow. This was the news, doubtless, that the letter announced. Clarisse's emotion, on reading it, confirmed the fact.

Zénaïde and Mangin were alone in the parlor. Father Roudic had started that morning for Châteaubriand to get his daughter's papers, and would not return till the following day, but this did not prevent the handsome brigadier from paying his addresses and dining at Indret, his presence authorized by that of Madame Roudic. Besides, this

brigadier was very calm about it, not dangerous in the least and well deserved that epithet of "*futur*" (intended), for he was as dry and cold as the tense of a verb. At this moment he was lounging in the foreman's comfortable arm-chair, his feet upon the andirons, while Zénaïde, dressed in her very best, crimson and tightly laced, her hair arranged by her stepmother, was setting the table; he was entertaining her solemnly with minute information upon the tariff of customs, the duty paid upon oilseed, indigo, and cods' roes entering the port of Nantes.

Not specially interesting, you think? Ah, love is such a mighty necromancer, that Zénaïde was transported with delight at every figure he gave, pausing from her work now and then, as stirred to the depths of her heart at these details of entering and transit — as if listening to delicious strains of music. The entrance of the apprentice interrupted the lovers, already enjoying a foretaste of the peaceful delight of a domestic duet.

"Mercy! there is Jack! It must be quite late. And the soup is n't done yet. Quick! to the cellar, Jack. And where 's mamma gone? Mamma!"

Clarisse entered, very pale, but calmer; she had rearranged her hair, and shaken the sleet from her damp clothing.

"Poor woman," thought Jack, as she forced herself to eat, and talk, and smile, gulping down large glasses of water, one after another, as if to force down some terrible emotion that seemed to strangle

her. Zénaïde observed nothing. Her appetite quite gone, because of so much happiness, her eyes never left the plate of her brigadier, and were enchanted to see with what majestic tranquillity he made everything that she set before him disappear, without pausing for a moment in his dissertation upon the comparative tariffs of raw tallow and lard. The custom-house made Man was this Mangin! A fine talker, speaking in carefully selected terms, slowly, methodically, but not more slowly than he ate, for he did not cut even a mouthful of bread without eying it all over, scrutinizing it, handling it thoroughly, just as he raised his glass to the lamp light every time, and sipped at his wine drop by drop before drinking it, as if he suspected some fraud, and was ready to arrest, just as it reached his lips, a contraband liquid, or a prohibited commodity. When he was present, the meal dragged interminably. Clarisse began to grow impatient. She did not remain at the table, but went to the window, listened to the sleet beating upon the panes, and then, returning to the table, said:

"What a storm we are going to have, my poor Mangin! How will you ever return? I wish that you were already safely home."

"Well, now, I don't!" said Zénaïde so frankly, that they all had to laugh, the young girl herself laughing loudest. However, Clarisse's remark had produced an effect, and the brigadier, interrupting a long tirade upon the taxes upon various consumable commodities, rose to go. But he was

not yet outside, and the preparations for this departure gave big Zénaïde fifteen minutes more of grace before the last good-night. The lantern had to be lighted, his coat must be fastened. The amiable creature attended to all these matters herself, and of course the matches would not light, and the official's gloves took no little time to button!

At last the *futur* was bundled off. His hood pulled down over his eyes, his muffler wound several times round his neck, and firmly tied, you may be sure, by a pair of strong hands, he seemed to have disappeared as completely as if hidden in a diver's suit. But such as he was, Zénaïde thought him superb, and standing at the door, her heart swelling at parting, she anxiously watched that fascinating Esquimaux outline plunge down the main street of Indret, escorted by the lantern, swinging to and fro. Her stepmother had to go in search of her.

"Come, Zénaïde, you must come in."

And as Clarisse spoke, there was an impatient intonation in her voice that was by no means justified by the young girl's loving solicitude. Her nervous anguish only increased from hour to hour, and did not escape Jack. But they talked together as they put the room in order. From time to time Clarisse glanced at the clock, saying:

"How late it is!"

"I hope he will not miss his train," Zénaïde replied, thinking only of her intended, and following him, now that he had departed, through every

step of his journey. "He has reached the end of the town — he calls the ferry-man — he enters the boat!"

"It must be cold on the Loire," she exclaims, ending her dream aloud.

"Oh yes, very cold," answers the stepmother with a shiver, but it is not on account of the handsome brigadier that she is disturbed. Ten o'clock strikes. She rises quickly, with a sudden movement such as one makes to dismiss a caller who has stayed too long.

"What if we go to bed!" And then noticing the apprentice about to lock the door for the night according to custom:

"Oh, that is attended to. I locked it myself. Let us go up."

But that absurd Zénaïde was not done talking of her Mangin.

"Do you think a yellow moustache is becoming, Jack? And what duty do oleaginous seeds pay?"

Jack could not remember. She must really ask Monsieur Mangin again about that. The tariff is so interesting.

"Are you going to bed to-night or not?" asked Madame Roudic, pretending to laugh, but really trembling in every nerve. At last they are going. All three climb the little staircase.

"Come, good-night," said the stepmother, entering her chamber, "I am dying with sleep."

But her eyes, nevertheless, were very bright. Jack, one foot upon the ladder leading to his loft, paused a moment, for Zénaïde's room that evening

was so littered with wedding presents that he could not resist his desire to see them.

This was just the opportunity to discover what he wished to know. Friends had been there in the day-time. They had taken out all the treasures, and there they were, spread upon a great chest of drawers, upon which stood the white image of the Virgin and the Child Jesus carved in wax. Near this a dozen little silver-gilt spoons sparkled in their case; there was a silver coffee-pot, a mass-book with clasps, a glove-box for a man's gloves, to be sure! and everywhere, crumpled papers, blue and pink ribbons that had served to tie all these surprises, sent from the Château. Then came the humbler offerings of the workmen's wives, or the overseers'. The veil, the wreath, sent in pasteboard boxes from Nantes, the gift of Madame Kerkabélek and Madame Lebelleguic; Madame Lemoallic had sent a clock, Madame Lebescam a table-cover, others had sent knitted or crocheted work; a bead ring, an image of one of the saints, a smelling-bottle, and lastly a "bridal couple from the Bourg de Batz" all in shellwork, two stiff little dolls, their dresses made of shells of various tints reproducing the picturesque costume of the country, a gilt corselet over the thick blue petticoat of the bride, the bridegroom in bagging breeches and short jacket.

Zénaïde exhibited all these treasures with great pride, carefully restoring each one to its wrapper. The apprentice gave vent to admiring exclamations, and thought to himself all this time:

"Now, what is there that I can give her?"

"And my trousseau, Jack, you have not seen that? Wait, and you shall."

She took a key from a cup on the chest, opened a drawer, and drew from it another key finely cut and very antique which unlocked the oaken press that had been in the family for more than a hundred years. The two doors opened and the fragrance of freshly washed clothes and orris filled the air.

Jack admired the great piles of yellowed sheets spun by the first Madame Roudic, and heaps of linen, wrought and gauffered and pleated by those nimble Breton fingers that are so skilled at fluting surplices and caps.

"There! Is there enough of them?" asked Zénaïde triumphantly.

And indeed even in his mother's glass-doored presses that were filled to overflowing with embroideries and fine laces, he had never seen so much linen, arranged in such beautiful order.

"But that is not the best of all, my dear Jack. Just look at this!"

And lifting a heavy pile of petticoats, she showed him a cash-box concealed among all this whiteness of linen, as if it were the bride herself.

"Guess what is in it! My dowry." She said this with pride.

"My dear little *dot*, my pretty little *dot*, to which I owe the fact that in a fortnight I shall be calling myself Madame Mangin. There 's heaps of money there, I can tell you, coins of all sorts, white and

yellow. Eh? But Papa Roudic has made me rich! All that, just for me and my little Mangin! When I think of it, I want to cry and laugh at the same moment, and then to dance."

And with a comical explosion of delight, catching hold of her skirts on each side, twirling her fingers in the air, she was about to execute a clumsy dance in front of that blessed cash-box to which she owed her felicity, when a tap upon the wall suddenly interrupted her.

"Come, Zénaïde, let the boy go to bed. You know that he must be up early in the morning."

It was the voice of Clarisse this time, but changed and irritated. Somewhat ashamed, the future Madame Mangin closed her wardrobe, and said good night in a low voice. Jack ascended the ladder to his attic and five minutes later, the little house covered with snow and rocked by the wind appeared like its neighbors, to slumber, surrounded by the calm and silence of night. But the mask worn by a house is sometimes as deceptive as that worn by man, and while this house kept its windows closed like eyelids heavy with slumber, within its shelter was enacted the most sombre and heartrending of dramas.

In the Roudics' parlor on the lower floor the lamp is extinguished. In the rear of the room, lighted only by the gleams of a great coal fire which has died down upon the hearth, sit a man and a woman. At each capricious leap of the flames, the woman's face is covered with sudden blushes, which seem like those of shame. The man

is on his knees. Nothing can be seen of him but a curly head, thrown backward, and a vigorous supple figure, bent in an attitude of adoration or supplication.

"I beg of you," he whispers, "I implore you, if you love me." What is it he implores? What is there that she has not given him? Is she not wholly his, at every hour, every place, through everything, and in spite of everything? One thing only until this night she has respected, the home of her husband. And now! The Nantais had only a nod to make, a word to write: "I am coming to-night, leave the door open," and she abandons to him this last refuge of her honor, ready to lose even that vestige of tranquillity which the guiltiest feel within the home that has never been sullied.

Not only has she left the door open as he asked, but as soon as the others are sleeping, she has arranged her hair, arrayed herself in the gown he admires, in her ears the earrings he has given her. She has striven to make herself look beautiful for this first night together. What more can he want of her. Something terrible, impossible, perhaps, surely something that she does not possess. Why else does she resist the passionate clasp of those two arms that enfold her, the eloquent prayer of the eyes feverish with covetousness, of the lips pressed against her own?

Weak and feeble though she is, she does not yield, she even gathers strength to resist the importunity of this man, and there is an accent of

revolt, of indignation in her voice as she replies: "Oh, no, no! Not that! It is impossible."

"Come, Clarisse. It is only for two days, I tell you. With the six thousand francs I shall pay back the five thousand I lost, and with what remains, I will win a fortune."

There is a bewildered, terrified expression upon her face, then a sudden startled motion of her whole body:

"No, no, not that."

She seemed to reply less to him than to herself, to some hidden thought tempting all her powers of resistance. Then he redoubled his tenderness, his supplications, she tried to escape from him, to avoid those kisses, caresses, that passionate, embrace which ordinarily silenced the scruples, the remorse of this weak creature.

"Oh no! I beseech you, think no more of that, find some other way."

"I tell you, there is none."

"But listen, I have a rich friend at Châteaubriand, the collector's daughter. We were in the convent together, I will write her if you wish. I will ask her for those six thousand francs, as if they are for myself."

She said all that was passing in her mind, the first thing that happened to occur to her, to escape from that persistent pleading of his. He suspected this, and shook his head.

"Impossible," he said. "I must have the money to-morrow."

"Well, then, why not go to the manager? He

is a kind man, and quite fond of you. Perhaps he —"

"He? What! he'd turn me out of the works. That is all I should get. It's such a simple matter. In two days, only two days I shall bring back the money."

"Oh! you say that —"

"I say that, because I am sure of it. Upon what do you wish me to swear?"

And seeing that he could not convince her, that she retreated at last into that obstinate silence within which weak natures intrench themselves against others, he said in a threatening tone:

"I was a fool to speak to you of this at all. It would have been better to have gone up to the cupboard, and taken what I needed."

"But, my poor boy," she murmured tremulously, for she feared he might indeed do as he had said, "you know that Zénaïde looks at her money every hour of the day, counts it over and over. Why! this very evening, I heard her showing it to the apprentice."

The Nantais started.

"Ah! is that so?"

"Yes! the poor girl is so happy. If anything happened to it, that would kill her. And besides, the key is not in the cupboard."

But suddenly perceiving that this discussion only lessened the effect of her refusal, that each of her arguments furnished the other with a weapon, she relapsed into silence. Worst of all was the fact that they loved each other, that the

glances they exchanged proclaimed it, as well as the pressure of lips upon lips, at intervals, during this sad debate. It was horrible indeed, that duet of which the melody and the words were so out of keeping.

"What is to become of me?" the wretched man repeated again and again. If he did not pay this debt, he would be dishonored, lost, driven from every corner. Then he wept like a child, rolled his head upon Clarisse's knees, called her his aunt, his "dear little aunt;" it was no longer the lover who pleaded, but a child, a child to whom Roudic had been a father, a child who had been spoiled by the entire household. The poor woman wept with him, but would not yield. Through her tears, she managed to repeat continually, "No, no, it must not be," clinging to those words, as a drowning man to some bit of wreck he has seized, and clutches in one last convulsive grasp. Suddenly he rose.

"Then you will not. Very well. I know what remains to be done. I will not survive my disgrace."

He expected a cry, an outburst. None.

She advanced directly towards him. "You wish to die. Well, so do I. I have had enough of this life of sin, of lies, of love that must be hidden, hidden indeed so well that it may be difficult to find it again. Come, I am ready."

He held her back.

"What! you would — what madness! Is it possible?"

But he was beyond arguments, unable to restrain himself longer, filled with smouldering rage at the sudden revolt of this will that confronted his. An intoxication of crime rose to his brain.

"Oh, it is all too absurd!" he said and sprang towards the staircase.

But Clarisse had reached it before him, and had placed herself upon the first step.

"Where are you going?"

"Leave me, leave me. I must —"

He stammered.

She hung upon him.

"Don't do that, I beg of you."

But a frenzy overpowered him, he would listen to nothing.

"Take care, if you move one step further, I will cry out. I'll call some one."

"Oh, call, if you like! And then all the world will know that your nephew is your lover, and your lover is a thief."

He stood quite near her as he said these words; all this struggle had been carried on in an undertone, for in spite of themselves they were seized with that respect for silence and slumber which is bred by night. In the red light flickering upon the hearth he suddenly appeared to her what indeed he was, unmasked by one of those violent emotions which reveal the very motions of the soul, while they distort the features. She saw him, with his great ambitious nose, his dilated nostrils, his thin lips, and eyes asquint from incessant watching of the cards. She thought of

all she had sacrificed for this man, how she had tried to adorn herself for this lovers' meeting, this first night they had spent together.

Oh! what an awful, terrible night for such a meeting!

Suddenly she was seized with profound disgust, disgust at him, at herself, that caused an utter collapse of all her strength, and while the malefactor mounted the stairs, groping his way through the old paternal house, every corner of which was familiar to him, she sank upon the divan, burying her head in the cushions that she might stifle her sobs and cries, that she might see and hear no more.

V.

DRUNKENNESS.

It was not yet six o'clock in the morning.

The streets of Indret were as black as at midnight. Here and there, in the windows of some baker's or wine-seller's shop, smoky lights appeared through the fog, as if seen through oiled paper, with the pale glimmer of a ray that can find no egress. In one of those groggeries close to the blazing, roaring stove-fire sat Roudic's nephew and the apprentice, talking and drinking.

"Come, Jack, another round."

"No, thank you, Monsieur Charlot. I am not accustomed to drinking. I am afraid it would not agree with me."

The Nantais laughed at him.

"Come, come! A Parisian like you! You are joking! Here, *minzingo*, two glasses of spirits, and don't be all day about it!"

The apprentice dared not refuse. The attentions bestowed upon him by this famous character flattered him immensely and not without reason. The designer, usually so arrogant and disdainful in his bearing, who had not spoken three times to him in eighteen months, on chancing to meet him this morning in Indret, had paid him the

honor of accosting him as a comrade, took him along with him to the tavern, and treated him to three glasses of variously colored liquids. This was such an extraordinary event that Jack had at first felt mistrustful; the other's manner, too, was very peculiar, and he repeated persistently, "Is there no news? Really, now?"

The apprentice thought to himself, "You think you'll make me do errands for you, like Bélisaire, but when you do — !"

However, this bad impression did not last long. On the second round of spirits, he felt more at his ease, somewhat reassured. After all, this Nantais was not such a bad man; he was merely an unfortunate fellow, misled by his passions. Who could tell? Perhaps all he needed was a hand outstretched to him, some friendly counsel to start him on the right path, lead him to give up gambling, and to respect his uncle's house.

At the third round, in a sudden burst of effusiveness, seized with an extraordinary warming of the heart, Jack proffered his friendship to the Nantais, who accepted it gratefully, and as they had now become friends, Jack felt that this was the time to give the other some good advice.

"Want me to tell you something, Nantais? Well, now, this is my advice — give up gambling."

This thrust was direct, and must have struck home, for the designer's lips twitched nervously (doubtless with emotion), and he emptied his glass of brandy at one gulp. Jack, perceiving the effect he had produced, did not stop there.

"And then, well, there 's another thing I want to tell you."

Fortunately, the voice of the publican himself interrupted them, for this time the Nantais might have experienced some difficulty in concealing his emotions.

"Hi there, boys! the bell is ringing."

In the cold morning air a monotonous, gloomy tolling mingled with the movement of the silent crowd, the coughing and clattering of wooden shoes as they climbed the steep streets.

"Come," said Jack, "we must go."

And as his friend had paid for the two first rounds, he insisted on paying for the third; and pleased to be able to draw a louis from his pocket, he threw it down upon the counter and said, "Pay yourself!"

"Hang it all, a yellow-boy!" said the tavern-keeper, who was not accustomed to seeing gold pieces drop from the pockets of apprentices. The Nantais said nothing, but he started. Had this youngster been at the cupboard too? Jack noted their astonishment triumphantly.

"And there are more to match it!" he remarked, slapping his overalls; then leaning towards the designer, he said close to his ear:

"It is for a present I am going to make Zénaïde."

"Oh, indeed?" asked the other with an ugly smile.

The tavern-keeper continued to finger the coin with considerable uneasiness.

"Come, be quick," said Jack. "You'll make me miss the flag."

And in fact, though the bell had not ceased ringing, it rang slowly, lengthening its strokes as if it lacked strength for the last summons. At length the change was made, and the two friends went out arm-in-arm.

"What a pity, old boy, that you have to go back to that hole! The Saint-Nazaire boat will not go for an hour yet, and I'd have been delighted to stay a while with you. It really does me good just to listen to you. Ah, if there had always been some one to give me advice like that!"

And very gently he drew the apprentice towards the bank of the Loire. The other offered no objection. He walked giddily along, stumbling at each step, and as the sleet had left the ground quite slippery, he leaned heavily upon the arm of his new friend to save himself from falling. It seemed to him as if some one had given him a frightful knock on the head, as if leaden bands were squeezing in his skull. But this lasted only a few minutes.

"Wait a second," he said; "I don't think I can hear the bell now."

"Impossible!"

They retraced their steps. A pale streak of light pierced the darkness, directly over the ironworks. The flag had disappeared. Jack was terrified. This was the first time such a thing had happened to him. But the Nantais was even more disturbed than himself.

"It is my fault, it is my fault," he said. He spoke of going to the manager, to inform him that Jack was not the guilty one, and to beg clemency. In his turn, the apprentice tried to reassure the other.

"Pshaw! never mind," he said; "it won't kill me to be marked absent on the roll for once; I will accompany you to the boat, and get back in time for the ten o'clock bell. Old Lebescam will give me a blowing-up, but that is all." It was just that "blowing-up" he dreaded. But even that fear could not prevent him from feeling both joy and pride as he walked upon the arm of the Nantais, firmly convinced that the latter was restored to the path of virtue through his efforts. This idea uppermost, he continued to talk to him, as they descended towards the river, beneath the great trees white with sleet, and he spoke with such energy that he did not feel how cold and black the morning was, nor how the north wind whistled, cutting and keen as a knife. He spoke of honest Father Roudic, so tender-hearted and kind and trustful, of Clarisse, who, in spite of all she had to make her happy, made one pity her at times because of her pallor and the startled, frightened expression in her eyes.

"Ah, if you had seen her this morning when I left! She was so white! She looked like a corpse."

As he spoke he felt the arm of the Nantais tremble against his own, which proved to him that the fellow was not devoid of heart.

"Did she say nothing to you, Jack? Come, now, did n't she say something?"

"Not a word. Zénaïde was talking to her, but she never answered. She ate nothing. I am afraid she may be ill."

"Poor woman!" said the Nantais with a sigh of relief, which the child mistook for sadness, — a sigh that filled him with pity.

"That 'll do this time," he thought. "I must not be too hard upon him."

They were near the quay. The boat was not in as yet. A heavy fog overhung the river from one bank to another.

"Shall we go in there?" suggested the Nantais.

It was a shed built of boards, with benches inside, and in stormy weather served as a rude shelter for workmen waiting for the ferry. Clarisse knew that shed well. And the old woman, seated in one corner of it, where she sold not a little corn-brandy and black coffee, had many a time seen Madame Roudic waiting for the ferry-boat, and crossing the Loire in "weather too bad for a dog to be out in."

"It 's bitter cold, boys! Won't you take a drop?" Jack was quite ready to take a drop, but on condition that he paid for it. He even beckoned a sailor, shivering on duty at the foot of the semaphore, to come and have a drink with them. The sailor and the Nantais gulped theirs down; it disappeared as if by sleight of hand; the apprentice imitated them, but what he could not imitate was that satisfied smack of the lips, that contented

"ah" of the sailor as he wiped his mouth on the corner of his sleeve. That dreadful dram! It seemed to Jack as if he had absorbed all the slag of the forge. Suddenly a shrill whistle sounded through the fog. It was the Saint-Nazaire steamboat. They must part, but they promised to meet again very soon.

"You 're a great boy, Jack, and I thank you for your good advice."

"Oh, never mind; don't mention that," Jack replied, shaking the other's hand vigorously, and quite surprised to find that he felt this parting as deeply as if he were leaving a friend of twenty years' standing. "But, above all, Charlot, remember what I told you. Don't gamble any more."

"Oh, never, never again," answered the other, hurrying aboard that his young friend need not see him explode with laughter.

After the Nantais had gone, Jack did not feel the slightest inclination to return to the shop. An unwonted lightheartedness filled him, the blood leaped through his veins, he wanted to shout, to run, to gesticulate. Even the white fog stretching across the Loire, crossed by great black vessels that glided through it like fantastic shadows in pantomime, seemed bright and attractive to him, and he felt as if he had wings and could fly through it. But on the other hand, what seemed to him gloomy and dreary enough was the whole business of hammering and boiler-making, and that dull roar he knew so well, and

from which he longed to run away. After all, Lebescam's "blowing-up" would be no worse if he was absent a whole day, or only for a few hours. The bright idea occurred to him: "As long as I am started I might as well profit by this chance, go as far as Nantes, and buy Zénaïde's present."

And here he is on the ferry-boat and a little later at Basse-Indre. Then he is at the station, transported by enchantment, it seems to him, so light, so easy does every undertaking appear to him on this morning. But he finds at the station that there is no train before noon. How shall he pass the time? The waiting-room is cold and deserted. Outside the wind whistles. Jack found and entered a public-house, more frequented by the working class than by others, although it stood in the country; for a sign it bore on the roughly-painted front these words, in black letters, "HERE, IF YOU PLEASE!" — the cry that resounds through the forge when the iron is ready calling the men to hammer it; a lying sign, like all signs, for forging is not the business carried on in this place. Though still early in the day, there are people all around the tables lighted by small kerosene lamps, whose sickening smoke mingled with that of the pipes, thickening the atmosphere. *Here, if you please*, there sat drinking, in corners, those who haunt the public-house during week-days and working hours, — the scum, the dregs of the workshops, — all who find draining a dram easier work than handling a tool. *Here, if you please*, only sordid faces were to be

seen, the smock of idleness, soiled with wine and mud, arms enervated from the sleep of drunkenness; here were disorderly characters of every sort, — the loungers, the failures of the workshop, for whom the pothouse lies in wait outside the factory, tempting them with its treacherous window, where rows of colored bottles disguise the poison of the alcohol. Suffocated by the smoke, bewildered by the noise and confusion of the place, the apprentice hesitated about taking a seat upon one of the benches beside the others, when he heard some one call from the back of the room:

"Hi, Aztec! you here?"

"Why, there is Gascogne!"

Gascogne was one of the Indret workmen, discharged the night before for drunkenness. Near him, at the same table, a sailor was seated, rather, a raw attempt at one; he was sixteen years old or thereabouts, his face was beardless, but already corrupt, and with its weak, relaxed mouth, projected from his big blue collar with an easy air of effrontery. Jack joined this amiable company.

"You 're in for a time of it, too, old boy!" said Gascogne with that air of "hail fellow well met!" that unites all bad workmen. "That 's what I like! Have a drink with us."

He accepted, and there ensued a contest, where each side vied with the other in doing the honors over bottles of every color. The young sailor charmed Jack especially. He wore his fine cos-

tume with such a formidable and swaggering air, such easy assurance and audacity, as if he feared neither God nor the gendarmes! Young as he was, he had already been twice around the world, and he talked of Java and of the Javanese women as familiarly as if they were merely on the other side of the Loire. How gladly the apprentice would have exchanged his knitted waistcoat, his smock overalls, for that oilskin cap perched so rakishly on the back of the youth's shaven head, and that loose blue belt, faded by sun and sea-water! Ah, that was a calling worthy the name, full of adventures, dangers, a life not confined to one spot. And yet the sailor grumbled every other moment when he spoke of it.

"Too much broth for so little meat," an expression that enchanted Jack, for it seemed to him the very soul of wit. Oh! what jolly fellows these sailors are!

"It's just the same at Indret," said Gascogne; "there's a hole!" And he added a volley of imprecations against the manager, the overseers, a set of good-for-nothings, who had only to fold their arms while others broke their backs for them.

"Yes, a good deal could be said about that," Jack remarked, suddenly recalling Labassindre's hackneyed phrases about the rights of the working man and the tyranny of capital. Old Jack's tongue moved as freely as his legs that morning. Little by little, his eloquence was too much for all the other talkers in the place. They grew

silent, and listened to him. They whispered around him: "That 's a smart one, that youngster. Easy to tell he comes from Paris." He could not have produced a greater effect, unless indeed he had possessed Labassindre's deep bass note instead of the hoarse crow of a young cock, that voice of adolescence, which every now and then broke into the shrill quaver of childhood, strangely out of keeping with its precocious gravity; at this moment it sounded very far off, even to himself, as if he were sending his words several regions above his head. Soon they sounded so confused, so indistinct to him that he no longer knew what he was saying, and then he felt as if he were rushing through space, rolling about as if he had been plunged from the car of a balloon in pursuit of his words and ideas, its motion making him sick at heart, causing his brain to reel.

He felt a sensation of cold upon his forehead, and this brought him to himself again. He found himself seated upon the bank of the Loire. How had he come there, beside that sailor, who was moistening his temples? His eyelids, which had great difficulty in opening again, blinked at the daylight. Then he saw in front of him the smoke of the iron works, and near by, a fisher was hoisting sail, and making ready to put off.

"Well, do you feel a little better?" asked the young tar, wringing his handkerchief.

"Oh, yes, well enough," Jack answered with a shiver, but his head felt very heavy.

"Then let us go aboard."

"Aboard?" asked the apprentice, much surprised.

"Why of course. We are going to Nantes. Don't you remember that you hired a boat of this sailor over in the public-house a little while ago? And here is Gascogne, with the provisions."

"The provisions?"

"Here, old boy, is your change," said the smith, loaded with a big basket, from which protruded a loaf of bread and the necks of bottles. "Come on, boys. The wind is fair. In an hour we shall be at Nantes, and then we can make a time of it."

For a moment Jack had a perfectly distinct perception of what he was going to do, of the abyss in which he was plunged. He would have liked to jump upon the ferry-boat moored close by to return to Indret, but that would have required an effort of the will of which he was not capable.

"Come on," said the sailor; "you are still a little pale; some breakfast will set you on your feet again."

The apprentice did not attempt to resist, but boarded the boat with the others. After all, he had still three louis left, more than he needed to buy clothes for himself, and a little gift for Zénaïde. So his trip to Nantes would not be wasted; moreover, one of the results of the condition he was in that morning was that he experienced the most contrary feelings, passing from blackest melancholy to an inexplicable sense of contentment.

Seated with the others in the bottom of the boat, he ate his breakfast in excellent spirits, his appetite increased by the keen salt breeze which sent the boat before it beneath an overhanging sky, a true Breton sky; the boat dipped sidewise, like a bird skimming the water with one wing. The rigging creaked, the sail swelled, and the two banks unwound to the sound of the lapping of waves. The familiar scenery bordering the river, the outlines of fishermen, washerwomen, shepherds, whose sheep grazing upon the short turf looked like big insects from a distance. Jack saw all these things, and his over-excited imagination exaggerated and poetized the entire aspect of everything. It brought back memories of former readings, of adventures by sea, tales of expeditions in foreign lands, suggested to him by the neighborhood of the sailor and the great vessels they met, their boat getting out of the way as it passed them. He could not tell why, but among many memories there presented itself obstinately to his mind an English vignette of an old Robinson Crusoe that had been his when quite young, its pages worn and yellowed with age; it represented Robinson lying in his hammock, a pot of gin in his hand, and underneath the picture this inscription, which ten years had not effaced from his mind: *And in one night's debauch I forgot all my good resolutions.*

Perhaps at this moment there were empty bottles rolling about in the boat, wine spilt about and men lying near the remains of their meal.

Jack knew nothing positively, but flocks of gulls scattering before the wind and whirling about the top of the sail made his delusion that he was bound upon a long sea-voyage still more real to him; for his face was uplifted, and he could see nothing but sky, fleecy masses of gray clouds, following each other in endless succession, and flying with such fatiguing speed that he grew dizzy in watching them.

He changed his position, recalled to reality by the singing of his two comrades, who were shouting the refrain of a sailors' chorus:

"Et bitte et bosse! Et quelle noce!"

Ah, if he could have sung like them! but he knew only such childish ditties as *Mes souliers sont rouges*, and he would have been ashamed to betray his ignorance. Then he began to grow very uneasy at feeling some one's gaze fixed upon his own. Standing opposite him, spitting every now and then upon his hands to aid him in holding the tiller, the skipper transfixed him with his clear eyes, which looked faded in contrast to his bronzed, tanned face. Jack would have been glad if he could have silenced that scornful glance that said as plainly as words, "You wretched young rascal, are n't you ashamed of yourself?" but these old sea-dogs, constantly on the look-out for squalls, seeing them coming over the blue waves in shifting shadows, have keen eyes that quail at nothing. To divert this annoying surveillance, Jack tried to force the skipper to drink. He

held out a glass that trembled in his hand, and a bottle, from which he endeavored to pour wine, although it had been emptied to the last drop, and said: "Come, skipper, have a drink of wine."

The skipper signified that he was not thirsty.

"Let the old Lascar alone," said the young sailor in a whisper to his friend; "don't you remember that he did n't wish to take us? it was his wife who made him. He thought you had too much money about you, that it was very queer."

Ah, do you suppose for a moment Jack will allow others to treat him as if he were a thief? You must understand that he can have all the money he wants. He has only to write to ——. Fortunately, even in the confusion of his ideas, he remembers that his mother forbade the mention of her name in connection with those hundred francs, and he contents himself with affirming that the money is really his own, that it is his savings with which he is going to buy clothes and a little present for Zé — Zé — Zénaïde!

He talked and talked, but no one paid the least attention to him. Gascogne and the sailor were wrangling with each other. One wished to go to Châtenay, a large suburb of Nantes which stretches lengthwise along the water's edge, dreary and dilapidated, factories and sheds alternating with public-houses, or wretched gardens blackened with rain and smoke. The other wished to go on to Nantes, and as the dispute grew warmer, there were threats of "smashing faces with bottles," "ripping open each other's

insides with knives," or in milder terms, "splitting each other's skulls to see what was in them."

The comical part of it was, they exchanged these amenities almost in each other's ears, clinging to the side of the boat to avoid tumbling out, for the wind was high and the little boat as it furrowed the river, leaned heavily sidewise. To execute the sanguinary threats in which they had indulged, they certainly would have needed free hands and somewhat more space. But Jack did not see it in that light; on the contrary, took the affair very seriously, and pained at the lack of harmony that had suddenly arisen between his two comrades, he endeavored to calm, to reconcile them.

"My friends, my dear friends, I beg of you — "

Tears were in his eyes, in his voice, on his cheeks. A wave of emotion swept over him; it seemed that every other sensation melted, faded away in an overpowering desire to weep. Perhaps it was because he saw so much water around him. At length there was a lull in hostilities; it ended as suddenly as it had begun, for Châtenay and its last house had glided past them, and they were entering Nantes. The skipper hauled in the sail and took his oars to guide them more safely through the noisy, crowded harbor.

Jack tried to rise and look about him, but he was compelled to sit down again very quickly, his head reeling. As before in the morning, he experienced the sensation of being swung around in the air at some tremendous height. But this

time he did not lose consciousness. Everything spun round and round. Old sculptured houses with stone balconies mingled with the masts of vessels, followed them, swallowed them up, and then they themselves disappeared, and were replaced by great swelling sails, black, smoking funnels and shining hulls, red and black. At the bow of each vessel, just beneath the bowsprit, pale, slender, muffled figures rose and fell with the movement of the waves, sometimes dripping with water, and seeming to weep from weariness and exhaustion. At least, Jack fancied all this. In the confined space between the massive quays, under that overhanging sky which carried the glance further because it was hemmed in overhead, the ships appeared like prisoners to him, and the names inscribed upon their sides seemed to ask again and again for sunlight and freedom of space, and the golden roadsteads of transatlantic lands.

Then he thought of Mâdou, of his flights through the port of Marseilles, the queer hiding-places he had found at the bottom of holds, in coal-bunkers, among merchandise and baggage. But this was merely a passing thought like the others, and fled at the "Heave ho!" of the sailors hauling the ropes, the creaking of the pulleys at the top of the mast, and the sound of hammering in the dockyards.

Suddenly Jack discovers that he is no longer in the boat. How did it happen? When did he land? There are gaps like these in dreams, and


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sailor's girdle wound around his smock! He longed to cry to that other, "But, lunatic, you do not look like a sailor! Of what use your pipe and belt and the sailor's cap of your young seaman? It is no use to swagger between your comrades, rolling your shoulders, and stuttering with that blustering air: 'Too much broth for so little meat, d— it all!' At most you look like some choir-boy that has drunken the wine from the altar, with your blue girdle badly tied, and worn too high, and your face guileless in spite of yourself. Look! people are turning about to laugh at you as you pass by!"

But quite incapable of expressing anything in words, he merely thinks this to himself, and is compelled to follow his companion, jolted about at every zigzag motion, every caprice of his. He accompanies his double to a big gilded café adorned with mirrors, where every image reflected seems to be tumbling forward. The Jack who has still his eyesight sees in front of him, among the people passing in and out, a forlorn, miserable looking group, in the midst of which stands his double, very pale and dirty, stained with splashes of mud from his heavy and unsteady footsteps. A waiter approaches the three roisterers and they are turned out into the cold of the street, and now they wander about the town.

And what a town! How large it is! Quays, quays, an endless succession of them bordered by ancient-looking houses with iron balconies. They pass one bridge after another. Innumerable

bridges and river after river, their waters mingling, lending a monotonous movement like that of the tide to the confused visions of this aimless and lawless wandering. At last it becomes so melancholy that Jack finds himself shedding hot tears as he stands upon a narrow, slippery little staircase leading to the black waters of a canal, in which the foot of the staircase is submerged. There is neither eddy nor current to this water; it is thick and sluggish, mottled, and muddy with dye; not far away this water beats against the paddles of a great steamboat. Gascogne and the sailor are playing *galoche* on the bank. Jack is dejected. He does not know why. He is completely exhausted. He feels very sick. The thought occurs to him: "What if I drown myself?" He goes down one step, then another. At last he is on a level with the water. The thought that he is about to die fills him with pity for himself.

"Good-by, friends," he says, sobbing. But his friends are so busy with their game that they do not hear him.

"Good-by, my poor friends; you will never see me again. I am going to die."

The poor friends remain deaf as before; they are discussing a doubtful throw. What a pity to die thus, without saying good-by to any one, without a soul to try to hinder him from plunging into the abyss. They would actually leave him to drown, the wretches! There they are on the bank above, shouting and threatening each other as before, in the morning. Again they are talk-

ing of ripping each other open, of splitting each other's skulls, and a crowd is gathering around them. The police come upon the scene. Jack is frightened, climbs the steps, and makes off. He passes along a great dockyard. Some one is close at his heels, running and staggering. It is the sailor; his clothes are disordered; he is hatless, without a tie, his great collar torn open upon his chest.

"Where 's Gascogne?"

"I sent him rolling with a butt of my head. *V'lan!*"

And he rushes past, for the police are after him. Jack's ideas have become so very doleful that it seems quite natural to him that the sailor should have drowned Gascogne, as if murder must be the last step of that dark ladder upon which he has set foot — a ladder descending into the blackness of night. And yet he wishes to turn back to discover the fate of the unfortunate. Suddenly he hears a voice.

"Hi there, Aztec!"

It is Gascogne; also hatless, minus his tie, panting for breath, and desperate.

"I 've settled your sailor. One kick, and *v'lan!* down he drops in the canal! The police are after me. I 'm off. Good-night."

Which of the two is murdered? Which one has killed the other? Jack does not try to understand; it is quite hopeless. But, how, no one can say, the three find each other again in a pothouse, where they are seated before an im-

mense bowl of onion soup, into which they empty several quarts of wine. The preparing of this singular beverage is called "making chabrol." They made chabrol, must have made it many times in various public-houses, for bars and rickety tables follow each other so rapidly in this dizzy dream that the Jack who can reason has almost given up his attempt to follow the other. They see nothing but wet pavements, gloomy cellars, little pointed doors, surmounted by eloquent signboards, a cask, a foaming glass, or a bunch of grapes. Everything grows darker and darker until night falls, and these dens are lighted up; candles stuck in empty bottles reveal the hideous sight of negresses enveloped in pink gauze, sailors dancing jigs, accompanied by harpists in frock-coats. Jack, carried away by the music, commits a thousand follies. He has climbed upon a table, and executes a superannuated dance an old dancing-master of his mother's taught him when a child.

"In the Monaco,
Slide right, and then left!"

And he slides right and left till the table collapses, and he rolls with it among the remains, while shouts mingle with the frightful din of breaking crockery.

Seated upon a bench in a deserted, unfamiliar square, close by a church, that measure still beats time in his brain:

"In the Monaco,
Slide right, and then left!"

Of the whole day's performance, nothing more remains in his head, which is as empty as his pocket. The sailor? — gone. Gascogne? — vanished. He is alone in the growing twilight, when solitude is bitterest. The yellow gaslights gleam one after another, their flame reflected in the river and the gutters. The darkness of night rests over all like the ashes gathered above the dying embers of daylight, still glimmering faintly. Little by little the massive outlines of the church are lost in night. Roofs of houses disappear, and topsails of vessels. Life, too, seems to descend to the level of earth, can mount no higher than the gleam of a ray shed from a shop-window here and there.

After shouting, singing, weeping, after despair and boundless joy, Jack has now reached a condition of terror. Upon the dismal page of that melancholy book in which he has been reading all day is written, "Nothingness." Upon this page he now reads, "Nothingness and night." He does not stir, he has not strength to escape from that loneliness, that sense of being forsaken, which appals him, and would remain stretched out upon the bench, like others in his condition, reduced to an annihilation that is not sleep, but a well-known cry, a cry that brought deliverance, roused him from his torpor:

"Hats, hats to sell!"

He called: "B'lisaire!"

It is Bélisaire. Jack tries to get up, to explain that he has "b-b-b-een on a t-t-t-ime," but he

cannot tell whether he has been successful or not. However that may be, he leans upon the peddler, whose gait is quite harmonious with his own, as halting and laborious, but sustained at least by a vigorous will. Bélisaire leads him, scolding gently. Where are they? Where are they going? The lighted quays are deserted. They reach a station. That is lucky — there will be a bench to stretch on.

What now? What is the matter? What do they want with him? They are rousing, shaking, jostling him about, talking loudly to him. Hands of iron grip his hands, his wrists are bound with cords. He has not courage to resist, for drowsiness overcomes every other sensation. He falls asleep again, in something that seems like a railway car. Then he sleeps in a boat where it is very cold, but he snores nevertheless, rolled up in the bottom, unable to move. Then they wake him again, pulling, dragging, carrying him along. And what a relief he feels when, after all his innumerable peregrinations, in the dazed condition of a somnambulist, he stretches himself at last upon the straw where he has rolled and falls asleep to have his fill of it, protected from light and noise by a door with two enormous, creaking, firmly-secured bolts.

VI.

BAD NEWS.

In the morning a terrible noise overhead caused Jack to wake with a sudden start.

Oh, that wretched awakening from the sleep of drunkenness, the burning thirst, the trembling and aching of the weary limbs that feel as if compressed by heavy armor which leaves sore spots everywhere; and then the shame, the unspeakable anguish of a human being who recognizes that he has made a brute of himself, and is so disgusted with the pollution of his existence that he feels incapable of beginning a new life! Jack experienced all this upon opening his eyes, even before he was in full possession of his memory again. It seemed as if he had been haunted by remorse even in his sleep.

It was still too dark to distinguish surrounding objects, but he was aware that he was not in his garret. He could not see overhead his skylight with its bright square of blue sky. The faint gray of dawn fell through two high windows that cut the light into innumerable patches of white, hovering upon the wall. Where was he? In a corner, not far from his pallet, cords, pulleys and heavy weights crossed each other. Suddenly the

frightful din that had awakened him a moment ago began again. It was the creaking of a chain unwinding, followed by the deep stroke of a clock. He knew that clock well. For two years it had regulated the employment of his entire day, called to him through the bitter winter and the summer's heat, when he was falling asleep in his little apprentice's room, and in the early morning its heavy notes knocked upon the wet pane of his skylight, saying: "Get up!"

Then he was at Indret. Yes; but usually that voice calling the hour sounded farther away, higher above him. His head must have been very tired, or those sounds would not have reverberated in it so loudly with such persistent vibrations — unless, indeed, he were in the clock-tower, in that high chamber which in Indret was called the "Solitary," and in which insubordinate apprentices were sometimes shut up. And there he was; but why? What had he done?

Then the feeble ray of daylight struggling into the room and revealing to him little by little its appearance, penetrated his memory, and illuminated each recess. He tried to reconstruct all the events of the preceding day, and all that he recalled filled him with horror. Ah, if memory might have been a blank!

But with relentless cruelty, his double, thoroughly awakened, reminded him of all the follies he had committed by word or act during the day. They emerged bit by bit from the confusion of his dream. That other Jack had forgotten noth-

ing, and, moreover, gave convincing proofs of everything; there was a sailor's hat without its band, a blue belt, some broken bits of pipe and tobacco in his pocket with a little small change. At each fresh revelation Jack blushed in the darkness, with exclamations of anger and disgust, the emotion of pride reduced to shame and despair at sight of his irreparable shame. One of these exclamations louder than the others was answered by a groan.

He was not alone. There was some one with him, seated upon the stone projection of one of those deep, old-fashioned embrasures made in the thickness of the walls.

"Who is there?" Jack asked himself uneasily, and he watched upon the whitewashed wall a clearly defined shape, grotesque and motionless, whose drooping outline suggested that of some animal, with its irregular and sharply-cut angles. There was only one being in the world deformed enough to produce such a reflection, and that was Bélisaire; but what could Bélisaire be doing here? Jack remembered vaguely that he had been assisted by the peddler. The stiffness of his whole body recalled to him the fact that there had been a struggle in the station, that hats and caps had been tossed about and scattered in all directions by a strong wind. But the recollection was confused, uncertain, and as if clouded with dregs.

"Is that you, Bélisaire?"

"Oh, yes, it is I," answered the peddler in a hoarse, despairing voice.

"In heaven's name, what have we done to be shut up like two malefactors?"

"What other people may have done, I do not know, and it does n't concern me; but I do know that I have wronged no one, and it was downright cruelty to put my hats into such a condition."

He paused a moment, still shaken by his terrible battle, ever thinking of the night before, its darkness, and the disaster that had occurred to him, all his load of hats trampled upon, crushed, scattered to the winds. That terrible spectacle, which was constantly before his eyes, prevented him from feeling any drowsiness, or the weariness of his body, bound with chains and cords; he did not feel even the habitual torture of those dreadful boots, the suffering to which his wandering life and his deformity condemned him.

"Say, do you think they will pay me for my hats? For, you know, I had nothing to do with the matter. At least, you will tell them that I did not help you in that affair."

"What affair? What have I done?" asked Jack with some assurance; but then he bethought him that among the many follies which he could not recall at the moment he perhaps had committed some one more serious than all the rest, and the next question he asked Bélisaire was put more timidly.

"Tell me, of what am I accused?"

"They say — but why do you make me tell you? You know well enough what they say."

"No, I swear I do not."

"Well, they say you have stolen —"

"Stolen? I? and what?"

"Zénaïde's dowry."

The apprentice, now completely sobered, uttered a cry of indignation and grief.

"But that is infamous. You do not believe that, do you, Bélisaire?"

Bélisaire did not reply. Every one in Indret felt certain that Jack was guilty, and the police who had arrested them the night before, as they talked of the affair in the peddler's hearing, had convinced him also. Every circumstance was against the apprentice. When the first rumor spread through the factory that robbery had been committed at the Roudics', every one thought of Jack, who had been missing at the roll-call in the morning. Ah, the Nantais had not miscalculated in enticing him from the workshop. From the public-house on the main street of Indret to the Bourse station at Nantes, where the culprit and his accomplice had been arrested just as they were getting their tickets to escape, no one knows where, the trace of his theft had dogged the apprentice's steps and could be discovered by the gold he had scattered, squandered all along the road, — those twenty-franc pieces changed upon every possible occasion. And what more convincing proof than that whole day's debauch, that drunkenness which so frequently follows crime, like a halting and disguised remorse?

No one felt the least doubt as to his guilt. But one fact remained to be explained, — the com-

plete disappearance of those six thousand francs, of which not the slightest trace had been discovered, neither in Bélisaire's pockets, which contained only a few francs, the proceeds of his daily peddling, nor in the apprentice's, where were found only a few odd rusty coins, such as pass current in sailors' groggeries, where tars from every corner of the globe come to quench their thirst. Certainly it was not in the pothouses of the port they had spent, even in ten hours' time, the money that was missing from Zénaïde's cash-box.

Where was it, then? That was what must be discovered.

And as soon as it was day, the manager had the culprits brought to his office; unmistakably two criminals, pale, torn, shivering, and covered with mud. Jack had grace and youth on his side; there was something interesting, distinguished-looking in his fine, intelligent little face, in spite of the condition of his clothing, and that hideous blue sash. But Bélisaire, more frightfully ugly than ever, after all the blows he had received in the scuffle, the marks of resistance written upon his face and his clothing in scars and gashes, was rendered more terrible than ever by the expression of excruciating agony with which his swollen feet, compressed all night long, stamped his sallow, contorted face, covered with red spots; that expression closed his thick mouth, and gave it to the pathetic, dumb, determined, human look seen on the face of a seal. One sight of this man

and the boy side by side would tend to confirm the general impression which insisted that the apprentice, ever gentle and timid, was merely the tool of some wretch whose counsels had ruined the boy.

As he crossed the manager's ante-room, Jack saw several faces that produced upon him the effect of apparitions, as though the imaginings of some frightful nightmare had suddenly assumed bodily shape and risen up before him. Confident of his own innocence of the crime of which he was accused, he had carried his head high until this moment, but now his confidence deserted him. The boatman who had taken him to Nantes, the tavern-keeper of Indret, of Basse-Indre, even of Nantes, recalled to him the various stages in his journey of the preceding day. He lived every moment of it over again in a single second, with all its painful grotesque memories, and grew white and red again by turns, recalling his drunkenness and his shame.

When he entered the manager's office, he was humble, tearful, and almost ready to ask pardon upon his knees.

There was no one there but the manager, seated before the window in his big office-chair, and Father Roudic, standing near him, his little blue, woollen cap in his hand. The two overseers, who had brought in the criminals, remained in the rear of the room, in front of the door, their eyes never for a moment removed from the peddler, whom they regarded as a dangerous malefactor,

capable of every crime. When Jack saw the foreman, an impulse caused him to advance towards Roudic, his hand outstretched as to a friend, a natural protector; but old Roudic's face was so severe in its expression, and, above all, so sad, that Jack felt himself held at a distance during the whole examination that ensued.

"Listen to me, Jack," the manager began. "Out of regard for your youth, your parents, and the good character you have hitherto sustained, it has been granted, at my request, that instead of taking you to Nantes you may remain here, and a few days are allowed before bringing the case into court. At this moment whatever passes is among Roudic, yourself, and me; it depends upon yourself whether the matter shall go any further. All that is asked of you is to return what remains — "

"But, sir — "

"Do not interrupt; you may explain later; to return what remains of the six thousand francs that were stolen, for you surely cannot have spent them in a single day. That is impossible, is it not? Very well; return to us what you have left and I will do nothing more than send you home to your parents."

"Beg your pardon," said Bélisaire, timidly advancing his big head with an amiable smile that furrowed his face with as many wrinkles as there are tiny ripples on the Loire in an east wind. "Beg your pardon — but — "

At the icy, contemptuous glance the manager

bestowed upon him, he paused, greatly embarrassed, and scratched his head.

"What have you to say?"

"Well, if — if — as I see, the little matter of the theft is disposed of, I would like, if it is all the same to you, that you'd be kind enough to talk a little about my hats."

"Hold your tongue, you scoundrel! I do not understand how you dare to speak a word. Don't you suppose we know that you are really the guilty one in spite of your oily manner, and that this child would never have committed such an act without your evil counsel?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the unfortunate peddler, turning towards the apprentice as if calling him to witness. Jack wished to assert his friend's innocence, but Father Roudic would not give him time.

"You are right, Monsieur le Directeur; evil companions have ruined him. Once there was not an honester apprentice than he, or one more faithful to duty. My wife, my daughter, every one in the house loved him. We had complete confidence in him. It must have been his falling in with this fellow that has done the mischief."

Bélisaire, finding himself spoken of in this fashion, looked so frightened, so despairing, that Jack, forgetting for a moment the accusation weighing so heavily upon himself, came bravely to his friend's defence.

"I swear to you, Monsieur Roudic, this poor fellow had nothing whatever to do with all this.

When we were arrested yesterday, he had met me wandering through the streets of Nantes; and as — as I was in no condition to take care of myself, he was bringing me back to Indret."

"Then you did this business unaided?" asked the manager incredulously.

"I have done nothing, sir. I have not stolen. I am not a thief."

"Take care, my boy; you are on the wrong road. Only by a full confession and the restitution of the money can you merit our indulgence. As for your guilt, it is only too evident. Do not attempt to deny it. Why, unhappy child, you were alone in the house with the Roudic women that night. Before retiring, Zénaïde opened her cupboard in your presence, and even showed you where she kept her cash-box. Is n't that so? And later, in the middle of the night, she heard your ladder move, she spoke to you. Of course you made no reply, but she is quite sure it was you, for there was no one but you in the house."

Jack, quite overwhelmed, had only strength to reply:

"But it was not I. I have stolen nothing."

"What? And where did all that money, squandered, sown broadcast along your road, come from?"

He was about to say: "My mother sent it to me;" but then he remembered her injunction: "If any one asks you where those hundred francs came from, say that they are your savings." And such was his blind faith, his veneration for his

mother's least command, that he answered: "It was my savings." Had she ordered him to say: "It was I who stole the money," very likely he would have declared himself guilty without hesitation or argument. Such was the child's disposition.

"How can you expect us to believe that out of the fifty centimes you receive daily you could have laid aside the two or three hundred francs you must have spent in a single day, at the rate you were carrying things? Don't resort to such poor tricks as these. Your best course is to ask pardon of these worthy people to whom you have dealt such a terrible blow, and repair as quickly as you can the wrong you have done."

Then Father Roudic approached Jack, and laid his hand upon the latter's shoulder.

"Jack, my lad, tell us where the money is. Remember it is Zénaïde's dowry, which I have been working for twenty years of my life, and that I have denied myself everything to lay by such a sum. My comfort was always in thinking that some day my exhaustion and privations would be the price of my child's happiness. I am sure that in doing this thing you did not think of all that. If you had, you never could have done it. For I know you, you are not bad. No, this was the folly of the moment. Your head was turned at sight of so much money, and so close at your hand. But by this time you must have reflected, and it is only the shame of owning the truth that is holding you back. Come, Jack, a little cour-

age. Think how old I am, and that I shall never be able to regain all that good white money, and that my poor Zénaïde — Come, tell where the money is, my lad."

Much moved, and very red in the face, the good man wiped his forehead after this most eloquent effort. Really a culprit must needs have been hardened indeed to resist so touching an appeal. Bélisaire himself was moved to such an extent by it that he quite forgot his own catastrophe, and while Roudic was speaking, made the apprentice innumerable little signs which he thought very mysterious, but which his face translated with the most comical exaggeration:

"Come, Jack, give his money back to this poor man." For well this peddler understood the sacrifices the father had made, his own life being one perpetual crucifixion for others.

Ah, if Jack had had that money, how joyfully he would have tossed it into the hands of Father Roudic, whose despair pierced his very heart. But he did not have it, and could only repeat:

"I did not steal from you, Father Roudic. I swear that I have taken nothing."

The manager rose impatiently.

"Enough of that. To resist such an appeal as that you have just heard, your nature must be thoroughly bad; and if it did not force the truth from you, all that we can say to you never will. You shall be taken upstairs again. I will give you till this evening for reflection. If by that time you have not decided to make the restitu-

tion demanded of you, I will leave justice to take its course with you. It will make you speak."

Then one of the overseers, formerly a gendarme, and infallible and perspicacious as such are, approached his superior, and said in an undertone:

"I think, sir, that if you wish to get anything out of the boy, he must be separated from the other. At the very moment when he was going to tell all, I saw the peddler prevent him, making signs to him all the time."

"You are right. They must be separated."

And they were. Jack was reconducted alone to the room in the clock tower. As he passed out he caught sight of the terrified, dazed face of Bélisaire, who was carried off, handcuffs upon his wrists, and the thought of that poor unfortunate, as unhappy as himself, and less culpable even, added to the torture he endured.

Oh! how long that day seemed to him! At first he tried to sleep, to bury his head in the straw, that he might escape from the despair that possessed him. But the thought that every one believed him the guilty one, that he himself had given color to all these suspicions by his disgraceful conduct of the day before, made him shake and start convulsively a thousand times. How could he prove his innocence? By showing his mother's letter and letting it be known that the money he had squandered came from her. But if d'Argenton should hear of this! That lack of perspective, which causes the child's brain

to place the small reason before the great one, caused him to abandon at once this possible chance of salvation. His fancy pictured a frightful scene at Les Aulnettes, — his mother dissolved in tears.

But how should he justify himself? While he lay there upon his pallet of straw, still sore from the drunkenness of the previous day, and wrestled with those difficulties of conscience, the stir of activity of labor ascended to his ears; the clock struck above his head, its heavy, sonorous stroke seeming like the slow inexorable step of an approaching avenger.

Two o'clock. Four o'clock. The workmen return. Now they are leaving work again. Evening is approaching, and he can only have till evening to prove his innocence. If the money is not returned, he must go to prison. Jack wishes he were there already. It seems to him that he would be better off shut up, immured in a dungeon so dark, so deep, that no one would ever approach it to reclaim him. It would seem that he had some suspicion of the horrible torture still in store for him. Suddenly he hears a creaking sound upon the staircase, which is like the ladder of a mill, and leads to the clock-tower. Some one is panting, sighing, blowing a nose outside the door; and then is heard a little knock, such as is rapped by big, timid fingers, always afraid of making too much noise. Then the key turns in the lock.

"It's I. *Ouf!* but it is high up, this place!"

She says this with a little attempt at being gracious, engaging; but she has shed so many tears, her hair, usually so smooth, looks so disordered under her cap, her eyes are so red and swollen, that this artificial gayety following hard upon her grief only serves to emphasize it. The poor girl smiles at Jack, who looks at her sorrowfully.

"I 'm ugly, eh? A perfect fright. Oh, I never for a moment thought I was pretty. I have to make a wry face when I catch sight of myself. I am all waist, no figure at all, and my nose is so big, and my eyes are so small! Crying will not make them any bigger. Well, since yesterday morning I 've done nothing else but cry; a perfect Magdalen. And my little Mangin is such a handsome fellow! It needed a dowry like mine to make him overlook all my defects. The girls were jealous of me, and told me: 'He never would have asked you if it had n't been for your money!' Don't I know that? Yes, I knew it was my money he wanted, but I loved him, and I said to myself: 'When I am his wife, I will make him love me in turn.' But now, you see, little Jack, everything is changed. It is not for that thousand francs remaining in my cash-box that he would trouble himself about a creature as ugly as I am. That time when Papa Roudic would give only four thousand francs, Monsieur Mangin said that at that price he preferred to remain a bachelor. I fancy I see him when he comes again this evening; he will twirl his little moustache, and take

leave of me with a nice little speech. But I 'll spare him the trouble, you may be sure. I will give him back his promise before he has a chance to speak. Only — only — before giving up my happiness completely, I wished to find you, and talk to you a little, Jack."

Jack listened with bent head, crying. Young though he was, he understood how the whole nature of the woman was humiliated by that *naïve* confession Zénaïde had made of her ugliness. The intrepid virtue of the brave girl was so touching, her faith in the power of her love, in her qualities as a housewife, which were to subjugate after marriage this handsome husband bought with gold.

Seeing Jack in tears, she gave a joyous start.

"Ah, did n't I tell them so! Said I: 'He is not so bad. When he sees my big, ugly face red with crying ever since yesterday, it will touch his heart and he 'll say: "Sure enough! I was wrong to bring such trouble to poor Zénaïde, whom I saw so happy at the thought of getting married that she danced for joy before her cupboard."' It is true that when I lifted my casket yesterday morning and found it as light as a handful of snow, I felt as if my heart had been plucked from my body, there was such an emptiness in my heart; it has lasted ever since. But you 'll give me back my dowry, Jack, my friend, will you not?"

"But, I swear to you, Zénaïde, I have n't it."

"No, no, don't say that to me! You are not

afraid of me, are you? I am not reproaching you with anything. Only tell me where my money is; some of it is gone, I know, but what matter? We know what young people are — they must have their fun! Ha, ha! you made Papa Roudic's gold pieces fly, did n't you? So much the better, I say. But tell me, where have you put the rest?"

"For pity's sake, Zénaïde, listen to me. I have not taken your money. There is some mistake. It is not I. Oh, it is horrible that every one thinks me guilty."

She continued, without listening to him:

"But do you understand that he 'll not want me, that it is all over with poor Zénaïde's marriage? Jack, my friend, don't be so cruel to me. You will surely repent of it some day. In the name of your mother, whom you love so dearly, in the name of that little friend you have at home, — you have talked to me about her so often, — who knows? She may be your betrothed some day, perhaps, for these friendships between children result in something more sometimes, — well, it is in her name I ask of you this thing. Oh, my God! you still say no! How can I implore you? Look, upon my knees, with clasped hands, as if praying to Saint Anne."

Kneeling by the stone on which the apprentice had seated himself, she began to cry again, with those suffocating, strangled sobs, all the violence which shows itself in the tears of robust natures who do not readily permit their emotions to reach

the surface. The despair of such resembles an explosion; come from the depths, it is terrible to witness; it burns like lava, and overflows with unsuspected energy. Kneeling, the folds of her rustic dress clinging to her, her white coif bent in an attitude of fervent supplication, Zénaïde was the embodiment of some profound despair, that expression of hopeless prayer that is seen so often of a week-day in some deserted village church in Brittany.

As wretched as herself, Jack attempted to take her hand, one finger of which was encircled by her silver betrothal-ring, new and heavy; he attempted once more to explain, to defend himself.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet.

"Well, you will be punished. All your life long, no one will ever love you, for your heart is too wicked."

And she ran downstairs, never pausing till she reached the manager's office; he and her father were waiting for her.

"Well?"

She made no reply, contenting herself with a negative shake of the head, all utterance being submerged, choked with tears.

"Come, my child, do not grieve like that! Before we have recourse to the law which concerns itself with the punishment of the guilty rather than with reparation of the injury he has done, one resource still remains to us: Roudic assures me that this young wretch's mother is married to a very wealthy man; very well, we

will write to her. If they are honest people, as I am told, your dowry perhaps is not lost yet."

He took a sheet of paper, and wrote, reading aloud as he proceeded:

"MADAME, — Your son has stolen the sum of six thousand francs, the entire savings of the honest hard-working family with whom he lived. I have not yet handed over the thief to justice, still in the hope that he will restore a portion at least of the stolen money, but I am beginning to think that he has either squandered or lost it all in the day's orgy that followed his crime. This being the situation, prosecution is inevitable, unless you are disposed to indemnify the Roudic family for the sum that has been stolen from them. I await your decision before acting, but I cannot wait longer than three days, for I have already delayed too long. If I do not receive an answer by Sunday, on Monday morning the culprit will be given into the hands of the law.

THE MANAGER."

And he signed his name.

"Poor people! it is terrible," said old Roudic, who, in spite of his own sorrow, could pause to pity that of others. Zénaïde raised her head savagely.

"Why is it terrible? The boy has stolen my dowry. His parents must return it to me."

Cruelty of love and youth! She never for a moment thought of the despair of the mother, learning the disgrace of her son. Old Roudic, on the contrary, was touched at the thought, for he knew he would have died of shame at receiving such news as that.

And though Zénaïde was dear indeed to his heart, he nursed a vague hope that in some way affairs would work differently from what was expected, that the apprentice would restore the money of his own accord, or that perhaps that cruel letter would be lost on the road and never reach its destination. It is so fragile, the sheet of paper that is going so far, mixed with so many others, exposed to so many chances and accidents in its journey.

Yes, a letter is a light and fragile thing, and often goes astray. But that one the manager has written a moment ago and sealed by the flame of a candle, that letter which he has just posted with a bundle of letters, runs no risk of being lost. The Breton postman will grope for it and take it from the tin letter-box, toss it into his leathern mail-bag, loiter perhaps at some public-house on the main-road while it is still in his possession, but you may be very sure he will not forget it. It will cross the Loire, and no breeze from land or sea will have power to snatch it away. At the railway the ever-hurried officials will toss it into the canvas bag, worn with long service, and thrown upon the train, scarcely fastened; it will not be lost.

It will lie underneath a heap of other letters much bigger; it will slide, roll, jump with every motion of the car which a single stray spark could set afire; then it will arrive in Paris and slip through all sorts of gratings and sorting-places, and it will not be burned, stolen, lost, or torn,

but will go straight to its journey's end, more surely than any other missive. Why? Because it is the bearer of bad news. Letters of that sort can never be harmed; they never miscarry.

Proof of which is this: the letter, after traversing the great land of France, journeyed over the little road and up the red slope of Étiolles, the road already familiar to us, in the tin box of Casimir, the village postman. D'Argenton detests this old Casimir, for he is very lazy, thinks Les Aulnettes too far for him to reach, and quite frequently intrusts papers and letters to his wife, who cannot read, and often leaves something at the wrong places on the road. But note! On this precise day Old Casimir goes the rounds himself, and here he is ringing at the door, garlanded with faded vine leaves, above which the gilded inscription, *Parva domus, magna quies,* grows a little paler every day, eaten by sun and rain.

VII.

A CONVICT FOR METTRAY.

NEVER had the motto over the cottage of Les Aulnettes seemed more fitting than upon that morning. Standing apart and alone, under the wintry sky, across which great gray clouds were scudding, looking smaller than before among the trees, stripped of their leaves, the house, hermetically sealed against the damp of the garden and the road, participated in the dismal silence of the sleeping earth and the atmosphere destitute of a single bird. A few crows were pecking at seeds in the neighboring fields, and there was no sign of life upon the gloomy landscape save the flight of their black wings close to the ground. Charlotte was removing clusters of withered grapes from the wall of the room in the turret, the poet was at work, and Doctor Hirsch was sleeping when the postman's arrival, the sole interruption to the monotonous life of these voluntary exiles, brought them all together for a moment while the general *ennui* was forgotten.

"Ah! a letter from Indret!" d'Argenton exclaimed, and maliciously began to read his papers, followed by restless glances from Charlotte, and keeping the letter beside him without opening it, as a dog stands guard over a bone

he does not wish any one else to touch. "Oh! What 's-his-name's book has just come out. Will that fellow ever stop writing? And another poem of Hugo's — always Hugo!"

Why this cruel slowness in unfolding his newspaper? Because Charlotte is there behind him, impatient, her cheeks flushed with joy; because, whenever a letter arrives from Indret, the mother in her is stronger than her love for her poet, and this wretched egotist cannot pardon the fact that she does not belong exclusively, entirely, to himself.

That was the reason why he sent the child so far, so very far away. But a mother's heart, even this woman's, is made of such stuff, that the farther away her child is, the more she loves it; as if the strength of her love could bridge the distance, and draw that heart to hers.

Since Jack's departure, his mother, tormented by remorse, adores him with as complete a show of weakness as she had before displayed in abandoning him. She avoided mention of him for fear of irritating her poet, but she thought of him.

The poet suspected this. It added fuel to his hatred of the child. At Roudic's first letters, complaining of the apprentice, his disdain and satisfaction were extreme.

"You see! we shall not be able to make even a workman of him!"

But he did not rest contented there. He wished to humiliate, to degrade Jack still further. And this time his happiness was to be complete. At

the first words he read of the letter from Indret, for at last he decided to open the letter, his face grew pale with emotion, and malevolent triumph flashed from his eyes.

"I was sure it would be so."

Then, suddenly seeing the demand made upon them to restore this money, he foresaw a number of unpleasant complications, and with a heart-broken air he passed the letter to Charlotte.

What a terrible blow to follow upon so many others! Wounded in her motherly pride, before her poet, wounded in her tenderness, the wretched woman was stabbed still more deeply by the reproaches of her own conscience.

"It is your own fault," cried that acute voice that is stronger than all the sophistries, all the reasoning in the world. "It is your fault. Why did you desert him?"

But now he should be saved at any price. But how? Where could the money be found? She had nothing left of her own. The sale of her furniture, that migratory establishment of hers, adorned with rich but useless trumpery of every sort, brought but a few thousand francs, which were soon spent. *Bon ami*, on his departure, had desired to give her a present, a souvenir, but she had obstinately refused to accept it, wishing to preserve her dignity for d'Argenton's sake. And so she had nothing left, except a few jewels, that would not bring one quarter of the necessary sum. As for asking the poet, the thought did not once enter her mind. She knew him too

well. For in the first place, he hated the child; moreover, he was niggardly. The characteristics of the Auvergnat showed themselves in a petty selfishness, a love of hoarding, the peasant's respect for money deposited at his notary's. Besides, he was not very rich; Les Aulnettes was considerable expense to him, and made large inroads upon his income, and it was for reasons of economy he was passing the winter there, in spite of the *ennui* and isolation involved, hoping to make amends for the summer's extravagance, and the incessant coming and going of his boon companions, who maintained about him that "intellectual atmosphere" his restless literary life required, and for which he paid dear.

No, she certainly had not thought of appealing to him. But he believed she might, and anticipated her by presenting the icy front of a man who expects an appeal for money.

"I always said that the boy's instincts were bad," he said when she had had time enough to finish the letter.

She did not reply, perhaps even she did not hear, so absorbed she was with the one thought: "The money must be found before three days, or my child must go to prison."

He continued:

"How ashamed I shall be to look my friends in the face after getting them to recommend such a monstrosity! It will teach me not to be so kind again! A pretty piece of business!"

The mother colored.

"I must have that money before three days, that my child need not be sent to prison."

He was watching her, read what she was thinking, and deemed it prudent to prevent her asking for anything by anticipating her.

"To think there is no way to prevent this disgrace, to save the unhappy wretch from being sentenced! We are not rich enough."

"Oh! if you only would—" she said, hanging her head.

He thought the request for money was coming, and her persistence threw him into a rage.

"*Parbleu!* if I only would! I was expecting that. As if you do not know better than any one else what is spent here, and what frightful waste goes on around me. And so it was not enough to have that miserable rascal depending upon me for two years! I must also pay for his thefts. Six thousand francs! But where do you expect me to find them?"

"Oh, I understand very well. It was not of you I was thinking."

"Not of me! Of whom, then?"

Ashamed and with drooping head, she named the man with whom she lived so long,—Jack's *Bon ami*, whom she referred to as an "old friend." She pronounced the name tremblingly, expecting some jealous explosion from the poet concerning that past of hers which she imprudently recalled. But no! When she mentioned *Bon ami*, d'Argenton merely colored a little—he had thought of that himself.

After all, this former protector of Ida's, like the boy, formed a part of Charlotte's past, — of that mysterious past concerning which his pride made him refrain from questioning her while he feigned to ignore it, like those histories of the Restoration which suppress the republic and Bonaparte's reign, passing over them in their books as if they had not existed. He thought to himself, "It was before my day. Let them arrange the matter between themselves," delighted to be able to dismiss it so easily; he did not, however, permit her to guess how much his mind was set at ease, but assumed a deeply wounded air.

"My pride has already made so many sacrifices to my love that it can easily make this last concession."

"Oh, thank you, thank you! How good you are!"

And they began to talk of the loan in a low voice on account of Doctor Hirsch, whose slipshod and indolent feet could be heard shuffling idly about the house. It was a strange conversation, monosyllabic, halting and evasive; he affected extreme repugnance, she a delicate conciseness. Throughout they referred merely to *some one*. *Some one* would not refuse, had already given proof of this by the offer which had been declined on a former occasion. Unfortunately *some one* lived in Touraine — what was to be done? A letter would take two days, and as many for the answer. Suddenly Charlotte suggested, frightened at her own audacity:

"What if I go myself?" He answered composedly:

"Very well; that is a good idea. Let us go."

"What! you will really accompany me to Tours? Then you will go to Indret too, for it is on the same road, and we can carry the money there immediately."

"To Indret also."

"Oh, how kind you are, how kind you are!" repeated the poor foolish creature, kissing his hands. But the truth was, he was not at all anxious to let her go to Tours alone. Without knowing all her history, he knew that she had lived there, that she had been happy there. What if she should not return to him? She was so weak, so inconsistent! The sight of her old friend, the luxury she had renounced, the influence of the child she would meet once more, her entire past might entice her again, and tear her away from that tyranny which he himself felt to be heavy and hard to bear.

He had really grown unable to do without her. His egotistic vanity, his imaginary invalidism clung to her blind tenderness, her unremitting attentions, her expansive good humor. Besides, he was not sorry to take a little journey, to be diverted for a time from that terrible lyric drama he had been agonizing over for so long, with long-drawn-out and sterile ejaculations.

Of course he cloaked these fears, this need of diversion in chivalrous pretexts, telling Charlotte he would not forsake her, he would share trouble

with her as well as pleasure, and thus he kept for himself her loving gratitude in the midst of her sorrow as a mother. And besides, the bustle which every departure occasions diverted the frail nature of poor Lolotte from the mortal blow that struck her a moment before. Like those widowed peasant women who, as soon as a husband is buried, prepare a great funeral repast and forget to weep for their widowhood, so absorbed they are in their housewifely duties, Charlotte, in packing her trunk and giving instructions to Mother Archambauld, almost forgot the heart-rending object of her journey.

At dinner d'Argenton said to Doctor Hirsch:

"We are obliged to start on a journey. The boy has gotten into mischief of a serious, a most serious nature. We are going to Indret. We will leave the house to your care in our absence."

The other needed no explanations. It did not surprise him that the boy should get into mischief, and he showed what a faithful parasite he was by parroting d'Argenton's:

"I knew it would be so."

They left on the night express and reached Tours early the following morning. The *old friend* of the former Ida de Barancy, lived in the suburbs, in one of those pretty little châteaux that overlook the Loire and are well shaded and well kept with woods extending to the river, and turrets outlined against the horizon. "Monsieur le Comte," as Ida's servants had called him of old, was a widower, childless, amiable, and a man of

the world. In spite of the somewhat abrupt fashion in which she had left him, he had the pleasantest recollections of the light-hearted, prattling young woman who for a time had enlivened his solitude, and in reply to a little note from Charlotte, said that he would be pleased to see her.

They hired a carriage at the hotel, and leaving the town, followed a fine hilly road. Charlotte was somewhat disturbed at the poet's persistency in following her. She was wondering:

"Will he want to go in with me?"

In spite of her ignorance of worldly custom, she felt that this would be quite impossible. She was considering this matter whilst admiring from the carriage window the beautiful country where she had spent some years of her wandering life, where she had so often walked with her little Jack, then a fair, lovely boy, finely clad, now a workman in a blouse, and about to put on the uniform of the house of correction.

Seated beside her, d'Argenton watched her with many a sidelong glance, biting his moustache furiously. She looked very pretty that morning, with a slight pallor, caused by the emotion of hearing bad news, the fatigue of a night's journey by rail, and her embarrassment at the call she was about to make. She had robed herself in black, a bit of coquetry that served to emphasize the peach-like freshness of her complexion, and all these things lent to her beauty an air of distinction which the sick nurse and housekeeper of

Les Aulnettes had lacked for some time. D'Argenton the pontiff was disturbed, restless, quite miserable. It was not the jealousy of Othello that maddens and kills, but that enervating constraint that leads to one's feeling ill at ease and stupid. He began to repent of having accompanied her; the original *rôle* he was playing seemed foolish to himself and embarrassed him. He could not forgive himself for having permitted her to come.

The sight of the château was the last straw, and completely disconcerted him. When Charlotte said, "It is over there," and he perceived through the trees all the decorations of a charming bit of Renaissance with a terrace, and a drawbridge thrown across a river shaded by the verdure of summer, but visible at this time of the year, when delicate landscapes are softly pencilled with green, he accused himself of thoughtlessness, folly and imprudence. Evidently, once she was within she would not leave that place.

He had not yet learned how fast he was anchored in the heart of this woman, and that all the treasures in the world could have no power to tempt her from his side.

"Will he never get out?" Charlotte wondered, growing more and more uneasy. At last, at the end of the avenue, he stopped the carriage, and said:

"You will find me at the end of the road," adding, with a touching and humble little smile, "Do not be gone long."

"Oh, no, my dear; do not fear."

The carriage had gone on quite a distance, almost reaching the gate, but still he watched her. Five minutes later he perceived his mistress leaning upon the arm of a tall gentleman, of slender, elegant figure, still erect, though a certain stiffness in his walk indicated he was advanced in years. When the couple disappeared, d'Argenton felt an immense void in his existence, and the sweep of Charlotte's skirt as she turned down a path seemed ironical, irritating to him, as if from a distance it had suddenly struck him a blow in the face. Terrible anguish seized him. What were the two in there saying to each other? Surely he would never see her again; and it was that terrible rascal who had caused him all this humiliation and torture!

The poet seated himself on the worn-out step leading to a small door at one extremity of the large park where Charlotte had just disappeared, and awaited her feverishly, constantly glancing towards the gate, and watching the carriage stationed at the rondpoint of the entrance, the motionless coachman wrapped in a long cape. About him stretched a beautiful landscape which might have calmed a mind agitated by the most painful thoughts — vine-clad slopes, rich and regular wooded hills, pastures crossed by brooks and fringed with willows, and here and there a ruin of the time of Louis XI. and some of those pretty châteaux so numerous on the banks of the Loire, their frontons decorated with a writhing salamander between two interlaced D's.

To beguile that idleness engendered by solitude and waiting, when the slightest detail serves to enlist the wandering thought, d'Argenton had been looking at a band of laborers busied in digging out in the little curving valley outstretched at his feet a species of canal to drain off the waters. Approaching them at closer range, he noticed that they were all dressed in the same uniform — a blue blouse and coarse calico pantaloons — and although they had looked like peasants to him at a distance, they were merely a band of children, under the orders of an overseer, half peasant, half gentleman, who showed them where to dig and indicated the limits of the drain.

The silence with which this work was performed in the open air by such young workmen was impressive. Not a single word, not the slightest cry was heard, no vestige of the excitement natural to active life in possession and exercise of its forces.

"Straighter! not so fast!" cried the overseer, and the tools went at it again, and faces covered with sweat bent towards the earth, and at moments when they raised themselves to take breath, narrow foreheads and pointed craniums could be seen, heads which were stamped with atrophy, decline, or debauchery. It was evident that these children had never been reared in the freedom of nature; the pallor of most of them, their red or half-open eyes, told of the misery of city life in the stifled atmosphere of unhealthy homes.

"Who are these children?" asked the poet.

"Ah, Monsieur must be a stranger in these parts. They are the convicts of Mettray. The agricultural penitentiary is over there."

And the overseer pointed to a group of houses, new and white and regular in shape, which stood opposite them on the hill. The poet remembered the name of the celebrated penal establishment, but he was not acquainted with its rules, or the conditions for admittance. He questioned the man, mentioning that he was intimately acquainted with a family whose only son had recently plunged them into deep affliction.

"Send him to us when he leaves prison."

"I do not think he will be sent there," said d'Argenton with a slight note of regret in his voice; "the parents can prevent that by paying back the money."

"In that case we cannot admit him. We receive young convicts only. But we have an annex to our establishment which we call the Paternal Home, in which the solitary system is applied to young offenders."

"Oh, indeed? the solitary system?"

"We have found it work wonders with the worst natures. I can let you have a few pamphlets, if monsieur would like further information."

D'Argenton accepted, gave a little money for the young convicts, and turned back upon the road, loaded with pamphlets. The gate of the château had just closed. The carriage was descending the avenue.

At last!

Charlotte, radiant, overjoyed, her eyes sparkling, made haste to rejoin her poet.

"Get in quickly," she said.

Trembling with delight, she put her arm in the poet's.

"I have succeeded."

"Ah!" he answered.

"Beyond my hopes."

He repeated, "Ah!" very dryly and indifferently, and made a pretence of perusing his pamphlets with the deepest interest, as if to convince her that the rest was not of the least concern to him. He had not been so arrogant a while before, when he watched the closed gate, biting his nails, but now that she pressed closer to his side, humble and submissive, it was hardly worth while to worry himself. Charlotte, noting this silence, dared not speak, thinking that his jealous pride had been wounded, and he was obliged to reopen the conversation himself.

"Then you succeeded?"

"Completely, my dear. *Some one* always intended to make Jack a present when he reached his majority, so that he might purchase a substitute and settle himself in life. The present was to be ten thousand francs. They were given me at once. Six thousand francs must be reimbursed, and the other four thousand *some one* told me to use to the best of my ability for the best interests of the child."

"A use for them is found. They will pay for

a cell in the Paternal Home at Mettray for two or three years. There is no other place where an honest man can be made of a thief."

She trembled at that word thief, which recalled her to reality. In that poor little brain each new and passing impression effaced in a moment every trace of an idea.

She bent her head.

"I am ready to do anything you wish," she said. "You have been so kind, so generous!"

Beneath his big moustache the poet's mouth quivered with pride and pleasure. She was more enslaved than ever. He took advantage of the occasion to deliver a long harangue. She had great cause for self-reproach. Her maternal weakness had had not a little to do with what had taken place. A spoiled child like hers, always left to his own evil instincts, could not fail to become thoroughly depraved. Henceforth a man's hand would be needed to guide this restive horse. If she would confide the boy to him, he would make him walk straight.

He repeated several times, "I will crush him, or I will master him."

She did not answer. The joy of thinking that her child would be saved from going to prison was stronger than every other thought. They at once decided to leave that very evening for Indret. But to spare her a humiliation that would be so painful to her, they agreed she should remain at Basse-Indre, and that d'Argenton should take the money and bring away the culprit, who was to be

taken to the penitentiary at once. Already he talked familiarly of that institution, and in anticipation could see Jack clothed in the blue cotton jacket, mingling among the wretched young prisoners who were for the most part victims of the vices and crimes of their parents, and enrolled at an extremely youthful age in the great regiment of reprobates.

Sunday they left the train at the large manufacturing station of Basse-Indre, and secured the best room of a wayside inn, the town being without any quarters suitable for strangers. While the poet started upon his mission as executioner, Charlotte remained behind to await him in that squalid room; shouts and laughter and sounds of drunken revelry reached her ears, and drawling, sing-song ditties in that mournful strain common to Breton melodies, melancholy as the sea, or the vast waste stretches of the Landes. Sailors' choruses blended with these, more animated, coarser, but sad, too. Listening to this vulgar tumult of the public-house, while a fine, monotonous, uninterrupted rain beat against the window-panes, there came to this woman a singular impression, a sense of the exile to which her son had been condemned. Whatever his guilt, he was still her son, her Jack; and to know that he was so near to her brought back the memory of the happier years they had once spent together.

Why had she abandoned him? She remembered the charming, delicate child, full of intelligence and tenderness, and when she thought that he

was to appear before her as a common workman, a thief besides, and that he would still be her son, that vague remorse that had tortured her for two years suddenly assumed shape and confronted her bodily. This was the consequence of her own weakness. Had Jack remained at her side, instead of being exposed to the corrupt influences of the factory, if she had sent him to school with children of his own age, would he have become a thief? Ah! the predictions of that old doctor had been realized only too well. She would find her son degraded, humiliated.

The vulgarity of the working man's Sunday, the noise, the smells, the atmosphere about her, made her remorse still keener. This was the life her Jack had been living for the past two years! Every repugnance of that superficial nature, incapable of realizing the grandeur of a labor completed, of bread won by honest toil, revolted at the thought. To divert her mind from these gloomy thoughts, she took up the prospectuses of the "penal settlement" that lay open before her. The very first words made her shudder: *Paternal home. School of repression. The rule adopted is that of absolute isolation. The children are confined in cells and they never can see each other, even at chapel.* Her heart was heavy; she laid aside the pamphlet and went to the window to watch for the return of the poet and the arrival of the child, her eyes fixed upon a glimpse of the Loire which she could see yonder, at the end of the lane, its surface as ruffled as that of the sea, and rippled with rain.

Meanwhile d'Argenton was bent upon accomplishing his errand, and delighted with it. He would not have relinquished it for any consideration. He who loved posing had such a splendid opportunity for it, and for superb posing, too! He prepared in advance the discourse he would deliver to the criminal, and the apologies the latter must make, upon bended knees, in the manager's office. At the moment all these premeditated attitudes were indicated by a majestic carriage of the head, a solemn air in keeping with the event; and clad in sombre garb, wearing black gloves, and holding his umbrella high and erect, he ascended the main street of Indret, deserted at this hour because of vespers and the bad weather.

An old woman showed him the house where the Roudics lived. He passed the silent foundry, resting from labor, its smoky and blackened roof enjoying a refreshing bath of rain. But when he reached the house that had been pointed out to him, he hesitated to enter, fearing he was mistaken. Of all the houses in the row that stretched along that barrack-like street, this was the gayest and liveliest. From the open windows upon the ground-floor came the joyous sound of Breton songs, and the heavy feet of rustics clattered clumsily over the floor, as if it were a freshly beaten thrashing ground. They danced to their own singing, keeping time with their mouths — *au son des bouches*, as the Bretons phrase it, and their dancing had that spirit which the voice lends to rhythm and measure.

"Impossible! this cannot be the place," thought d'Argenton, prepared to find a disconsolate home, where his entry would be hailed as that of a deliverer.

Suddenly some one cried:

"Come, Zénaïde, the *Plat d'Étain*."[1]

And other voices repeated noisily:

"Yes, yes, Zénaïde, the *Plat d'Étain*."

Zénaïde! why, that was the name of Roudic's daughter! These people took their misfortune quite gayly, it seemed! While he was still hesitating, a woman's voice began, pitched very shrilly:

"C'est dans la cour du Plat d'Étain —"

And the chorus, in which a few men's voices joined, responded,

"C'est dans la cour du Plat d'Étain —"

And suddenly a whirlwind of white coifs passed before the window with a rustle of cloth skirts and panting voices.

"Come, brigadier, come, Jack," some one called.

This was really too much for the poet. Completely nonplussed, he pushed open the door, and in the midst of the dust raised by this wild dance, the first person he perceived was Jack, the thief and future convict, skipping about with seven or eight young girls, among whom was a big dumpy figure, with a very red and happy face,

[1] *The Pewter Plate.*

who was hurrying onward in the lively whirl of the dance, a spruce-looking custom-house brigadier, while driven against the wall, a good old gray-haired man, radiant with happiness, and amused at all this gayety, was endeavoring to make a tall young woman who looked on, smiling sadly, take some part in it.

This is what had happened: The day after he had written Jack's mother, the manager of Indret received a visit from Madame Roudic, who came to him trembling and agitated. Without appearing to notice his cold reception, for her shame had long since made her accustomed to endure the tacit contempt of honest people, she declined the chair he offered her, remained standing, and with a boldness quite surprising in her, said:

"I have come to tell you, sir, that the apprentice is not guilty. It was not he who stole my stepdaughter's dowry."

The manager gave a sudden start in his chair.

"But, madame, we have proofs that he did."

"What proofs? The most convincing one is that my husband was away from home, and that Jack was alone in the house with us. Well, monsieur, I can prove that was not so. Jack was not the only man in our house that night."

"What! the Nantais?"

She bowed assent, and oh! how pale she was.

"Then it was the Nantais who took the money?"

Was a momentary hesitation visible upon the features as pale as those of a corpse? At all events, her answer was firm and composed.

"No, the Nantais did not take the money. It was I who took it to give to him."

"Unhappy woman!"

"Yes, I am indeed unhappy. He told me he needed it only for two days, and I have waited that time, witnessing my husband's despair, Zénaïde's tears, full of the horrible fear that the innocent would be condemned. What torture! And still — nothing came. Then I wrote, 'If to-morrow, at eleven o'clock, I have not received the money, I will denounce myself and you also,' and I am here."

"Yes, I see, I see. But what do you wish me to do about it?"

"Arrest the real culprits, since you know who they are."

"But your husband? He would die of this two-fold dishonor."

"And what of me?" she asked with fierce bitterness. "Death is easy to bear. What I am doing now is far harder, I think."

She spoke of death with a wild abandon; she thought of it, called for it with a frenzy and eagerness greater than any her lover had ever awakened in her.

"If your death could repair your fault," said the manager gravely, "if it could aid in restoring her dowry to that poor child, I could understand your desire for death; but your death could be of benefit to no one save yourself. The situation would remain the same, a little worse, more hopeless, that is all."

"What, then, is to be done?" she asked brokenly, and in her uncertainty she became once more the Clarisse of old, a long frail body shaken by a conflict too strong for it to bear.

"First of all, we must save as much as possible of the money. Some of it must be left."

Clarisse shook her head. She knew the terrible instincts of that gambler. She knew how he had posssesed himself of the money, almost crushing her under foot to get at the cash-box, and she felt that he must have played with it and lost it all to the last sou.

The director had rung. An overseer entered, the ex-gendarme, Bélisaire's inveterate enemy.

"You are to go to Saint-Nazaire," his chief commanded. "You will tell the Nantais that I want to see him at once. You will even wait for him, to make surer."

"The Nantais is at Indret, sir. I saw him coming from Madame Roudic's. He can't have gone very far, I am certain."

"So much the better. Hunt for him quickly, and bring him here; and above all, do not let him know that you saw Madame Roudic in my office. He must suspect nothing."

"I understand," answered the perspicacious overseer with a wise wink, though he had not the slightest idea of what was going on. He turned upon his heels and went out.

After he left, no word was spoken. Leaning against a corner of the desk, Clarisse was musing, mute and rigid, the busy sounds of the iron works,

the groanings and whistlings of the steam, sometimes imploring, then threatening or plaintive, harmonized with the tempest in her own soul. The door opened quickly.

"You sent for me, Monsieur le Directeur?" asked the Nantais, gayly.

And then he became aware of Clarisse's presence, her pallor, the severe air of his chief; he took in the whole situation!

So she had kept her word.

For a moment his bold, brutal features were convulsed with a mad frenzy, — the frenzy of a man brought to bay, who is ready to kill that he may find some escape from the hopeless entanglement in which he finds himself, — but he wavered under the weight of that inner conflict, and ended by sinking in front of the desk.

"Pardon," he murmured.

A gesture from the manager bade him rise.

"Spare us your supplications and tears. We know all about that. Let us proceed at once to facts. This woman has robbed her husband and her daughter for your sake. You promised to return the money in two days."

The Nantais threw a distracted but grateful glance towards his mistress, who had saved him by a lie. But Clarisse's eyes were averted. There was no temptation to look in his direction now. She had seen his real self only too plainly the night of the crime.

"Where is the money?" repeated the manager.

"Here. I was bringing it back." This was

true, but as he had not found Clarisse at home, he had been taking it off again, quicker than he had brought it, and was hurrying for the nearest gambling-den, to stake it at play. He was a veritable gambler.

The manager took the notes from the table.

"Is this all?"

"There are eight hundred francs missing," said the other hesitatingly.

"Yes, I understand; a sum laid aside to start the game again to-night."

"No; I swear. I have lost them, but I will return them."

"You need not. No one asks anything of the sort of you. I will replace the missing eight hundred francs. I do not wish that child to lose one sou of her dowry. And now it is necessary to explain to Roudic how this money disappeared, and how it has been returned again. Sit there and write."

He reflected for a moment, while the Nantais seated himself at the desk and took a pen. Clarisse raised her head; that letter would be life or death to her.

"Write: *To the Manager: Sir, it was I who, in a moment of folly, took six thousand francs from the cupboard of the Roudics.*"

The Nantais made a gesture of protestation, but he feared Clarisse, and was compelled to allow the facts to reappear in all their cruel and logical truthfulness.

"*Of the Roudics,*" he repeated. The manager

continued: "*Here is the money. I cannot keep it. It burns me. Set at liberty the poor people I have caused to be suspected, and ask my uncle to grant me his pardon. Tell him that I am leaving the iron works, and that I leave without daring to see him again. I shall not return until by hard labor and repentance, I have won the right to grasp the hand of an honest man.* Now the date and the signature."

And seeing that the other hesitated, he added, "Take care, young man. I warn you that if you do not sign, I shall have this woman arrested immediately."

The Nantais signed without a word. The manager rose.

"And now you may leave. Go to Guérigny, if you choose, and try to behave properly. And in any case remember that if I hear that any one has seen you prowling about Indret, the police shall arrest you at once as a thief. Your letter gives them the right."

The Nantais bowed slightly, and glanced towards Clarisse as he passed. But the charm was broken. She gently turned aside her head, determined to preserve intact in her conscience, filled with remorse, the hideous memory of that other night, the image of the thief which still rose distinctly before her. After he had gone, Madame Roudic approached the manager, clasping her hands in gratitude.

"Oh, do not thank me, madame. What I did was done for your husband, to spare that honest

man the worse possible torture that could come to him."

"And it is on my husband's account that I thank you, sir. I am thinking only of him, and the sacrifice I am about to make for him is proot of it."

"What sacrifice?"

"That of living, when it would be so good to die, to sleep forever. My mind was made up, all was ready. Ah, I assure you, it is only for Roudic's sake that I remain. I long so for rest; I am so weary!"

And indeed that sudden miraculous strength that had sustained her during this crisis now forsook her, and the natural indolence of her nature reasserted itself in an utter collapse of her whole being, and as she went away, her body bent slightly, she looked so dejected, so completely prostrated, that the manager feared some catastrophe, and said gently:

"Come, madame, a little courage. Consider that Roudic will be unhappy enough when he reads this letter, that it will be a terrible blow to him. You must spare him the crushing weight of another misfortune still greater and irreparable."

"I shall try to think of that," she said, and slowly left the room.

And it was a great shock to honest Roudic when he learned of his nephew's wrong-doing from the manager. It needed all Zénaïde's transports of delight at recovering her dowry, while she tossed her casket up and down, to calm the amazed

grief which filled the heart of this worthy man, the grief every upright nature feels at meeting with infamy and ingratitude. His first words were, "And my wife was so fond of him!" And those who heard him blushed for the unconscious cruelty of this *naïve* remark.

And the Aztec? Ah! the poor Aztec had his day of triumph. On the doors of all the workshops a statement drawn up by the manager was posted, proclaiming his innocence to all. He was surrounded, greeted with congratulations; and it need not be said that the Roudics could not apologize to him enough, and made all honorable amends in their power. One thing only was needed to complete his happiness, — Bélisaire.

As soon as his cage was opened and he was told, "You are free!" the peddler disappeared without further questioning. The whole affair seemed so bewildering to him, the fear of being arrested again dogged his heels so persistently, that his one thought was to be off, to take to the road again as fast as his poor, wounded feet would carry him. Jack was disconsolate at hearing of this prompt departure. He wished to exculpate himself before this unfortunate, who had been beaten unmercifully on his account, imprisoned for two days, and almost ruined by the disaster that had befallen his wares. What pained Jack most of all was the thought that Bélisaire had without doubt gone away fully convinced of his guilt, as he had not allowed any one time enough to undeceive him; and the thought that this wretched

highway vagabond would think him a thief cast a shadow over his joy.

Nevertheless, he enjoyed the wedding breakfast of Zénaïde and her brigadier, and was dancing with the others *au son des bouches* when d'Argenton made his appearance. The apparition of the poet, majestic and black-gloved, produced upon the joyous assemblage the same effect as a hawk would have made suddenly swooping upon a flock of swallows at play. For when one has prepared himself specially for an occasion it is not easy to accommodate himself at once to a complete change of circumstances. D'Argenton's attitude proved this. It was useless to explain to him that the money had been recovered, and Jack's innocence established, that in coming to Indret, he must have crossed a second letter intended to make amends for the harm the first had done; in vain did these worthy people treat the apprentice like a son of the house, from Father Roudic, who patted him kindly upon the shoulder again and again, and called him "little lad," to Zénaïde, who grasped his head with her strong hands and ruffled his hair by smoothing it vigorously the wrong way, anticipating the time when she could perform the same friendly little service upon the head of Brigadier Mangin; the poet maintained his assumption of extreme gravity and dignity, and persisted in expressing to the Roudics in very touching phrases his regret for the grief that had been caused them, begging them to accept his apologies and those of Jack's mother.

"But it is I who owe apologies to this poor child," exclaimed Roudic.

D'Argenton did not listen. He was talking of honor, of duty, of the dreadful entanglements that result from evil-doing. Jack, though innocent comparatively, had sufficient cause for embarrassment, for he recalled his journey to Nantes, and that Brigadier Mangin, then present, could have testified as to the condition in which he saw him. He colored, and was much disconcerted by the Pontiff's sermon. But at last, when the latter had discoursed for a full hour, subduing all these honest people by the spell of his eloquence, distilling a dreary dulness, a listless somnolence to which old Roudic would have finally succumbed:

"You must be very thirsty after talking so long," said the fitter very naïvely, and then he ordered a jug of cider to be set before the poet, with a buckwheat-cake which Zénaïde had prepared for lunch; and really that cake looked so delicious, its crust so tempting and golden, that the poet, who, as we already know, was voracious, allowed himself to be tempted by it, and made a breach in it as frightful as that Bélisaire's knife had carved in the famous ham at Les Aulnettes.

Of the long harangue they had just heard, Jack remembered but one thing, — that d'Argenton had taken a long journey to bring to Indret the money that should save him from the ignominy of finding himself seated upon a criminal's bench.

The poet took pains to show the bank-notes his pocket-book contained, to give emphasis to the solemnity of the scene, and remarked more than once, slapping his pocket as he spoke, "I was bringing the money." And the child accepted this in perfect faith, imagining that d'Argenton had brought six thousand francs of his own money, expressly to save him; he began to believe that his antipathy for this individual had been a mistake, and that the latter's coldness and repugnance to him were upon the surface only. He had never before been so respectful, so affectionate towards the "Enemy," and the other amazed himself at the change, and did not recognize the restive horse; as usual, he took entire credit for the change, and told himself:

"I have mastered him."

This idea, coupled with the hearty reception the Roudics had given him, put him in fine humor.

Really it was beautiful to see the poet and the apprentice walking through the streets of Indret arm-in-arm, talking as they strolled along the embankment of the Loire. You would have taken them for two faithful friends; Jack was delighted to talk of his mother — to ask for news, for every little detail concerning her, to breathe, so to speak, her presence, in the presence of the man she loved so much. Ah, had he only known how near to him she was, and that d'Argenton had been debating with himself for more than an hour, some faint remnant of pity struggling

with jealous egotism, "Shall I tell him she is near?"

The fact is that in coming to Indret to play the pontiff, the poet had not expected such a *dénouement* as this. He would have been delighted indeed to have brought the guilty, humiliated child to his mother, who, in decency, could not have shown any tenderness of heart; but to bring back to her this triumphant hero, the martyr of a judicial error, to witness the outpourings, the emotion of those two hearts that never ceased to beat for each other, that was more than he could endure.

And yet to perpetrate such cruelty as this, to deny Charlotte the delight of seeing her son again, when they were so near each other, he needed some pretext, a subterfuge of some kind, some reason, whose appearance of justice he could formulate in majestic phrases. And that pretext was furnished by Jack himself.

Imagine this poor little Jack, captivated by the other's unwonted kindliness, in a sudden, impulsive burst of confidence confessing to Monsieur d'Argenton that he really had not the least taste for the life he was leading, and would never be a good workman! that he was left too much to himself, was too far from his mother, that he thought it might be possible to find him another calling better adapted to his tastes, more in keeping with his strength. Oh! indeed he was not afraid of work, but he would have preferred some kind of work that would give his arms less to do and his brains more.

Jack pressed the poet's hand as he spoke, and felt it grow colder, relax its hold, and finally withdraw from his own. Suddenly he confronted again the impassive features, the steel-blue eyes of his inveterate "Enemy."

"You pain me deeply, Jack, pain me deeply; and your mother would be heartbroken if she heard you express such inclinations as these. You seem to have forgotten what I have told you so many times, 'There is no more dangerous being in the world than a dreamer.' Beware of Utopias and air-castles. It is an Iron Age. Action! Jack; action! is the watchword."

The poor child had to listen to an hour of this moralizing, and found it far more penetrating, keen and benumbing than the rain which was falling at the time, far more sombre than the night which was beginning to veil the landscape.

And while they were walking back and forth upon the embankment, yonder on the opposite bank of the river a woman, tired of waiting in her room in the inn, was walking upon the quay, watching for the ferry-boat that was to land that terrible young criminal, the beloved child she had not seen for two years. But d'Argenton had at last discovered his pretext. With the unfortunate tendencies he had just discovered in the boy, the sight of his mother would only unsettle and weaken him, deprive him even of what little courage remained to him. It was more prudent that he should not see her. Charlotte would be reasonable enough to understand and make this

sacrifice for her son's sake. "Why, hang it all! life is not a romance!"

Thus it was that, separated only by the breadth of the river, so near each other that if they had called loudly enough they could have heard each other, Jack and his mother did not meet on that evening nor for many a long day.

VIII.

THE STOKING-ROOM.

How is it possible that such long and wearisome days, so painfully and laboriously filled, make up such short years?

Two years have passed already since Zénaïde's marriage and the dreadful adventure of which Jack had been the hero. What has he been doing all the while? He has worked, worked hard, followed step by step the road that leads the apprentice to the skill and pay of a trained workman. He has passed from the screw to the finishing of iron, has learned forging in all its details. His hands have grown callous, his intelligence also. At night he drops into bed worn out, for he is not very strong, sleeps, and never wakes till morning, when there begins again the same hopeless, aimless, monotonous existence. Since the famous journey to Nantes, the public-house fills him with horror. The house of the Roudics is very dreary; Monsieur and Madame Mangin have settled at Souliguen, on the coast, and indeed the whole house seems empty since the departure of the big girl, — as empty as her room seemed from the moment when she took away her cupboard, the big cupboard containing her trousseau.

Madame Roudic never goes out now, but remains seated at a corner of the window, the cur-

tains always drawn; she no longer expects any one, and the days drag along automatically, indifferently, letting her life flow away like the blood from an open wound. Father Roudic alone preserves the serenity of a happy conscience. His little eyes, so keen and sharp, have preserved the acuteness of their glance, contrasting strangely with that simple, blind, credulous nature for which evil does not exist.

Jack's life has been absolutely uneventful. The last winter has been very severe; the Loire has wrought great havoc, — invaded nearly the whole of the island, a part of which has remained under water four months. Work has gone on in the damp, the men breathing in fog and all the miasmatic air of a swamp. Jack has coughed a good deal, and spent many fevered hours at the dispensary, but these happenings can scarcely be called events. Fewer and farther apart, letters have occasionally reached him from Étiolles; very tender, when his mother wrote secretly — cold, sermonizing ones when the poet had dictated over her shoulder. The doings and sayings of d'Argenton occupied the most prominent place in these effusions of his patient victim. For instance, Jack was informed that the *Daughter of Faust* was completed, had received a reading before the comedians of the Théâtre Français; these knaves had the audacity to decline it unanimously, and in consequence had drawn down upon themselves a cutting speech from the poet.

Greater news even than this: there had been a

reconciliation with the Moronvals, admitted henceforth to the table of *Parva domus*, whither they brought every Sunday the polychromatic "little tropicals," to the intense dismay of Mother Archambauld.

Moronval, Mâdou, the Gymnase, how very far away all these things seemed to him! remoter even than Indret from the Passage des Douze-Maisons, separated by a wider gap than the interval between that fantastic past and the dismal present. The Jack of those days had seemed to belong to a more delicate, a superior race of beings, but he had given nothing of his golden locks, his soft and rosy skin to this tall, bronzed, lean fellow, with the red cheek-bones, the curved back, the high, thin shoulders under his blouse.

So the words of Monsieur Rivals proved too true; there are social distinctions that make gaps which cannot be bridged.

Another painful recollection of Jack's concerned the Rivals. In spite of d'Argenton's observations, he had retained in his heart a feeling of infinite gratitude for that excellent man, a tender friendship for little Cécile, and every year, on the first of January, he wrote them a long letter. Now two of these letters remained unanswered. What was the reason? What had he done?

One thought alone sustained our friend Jack amid all the disappointments that his unfortunate destiny had in store for him. "Earn your living; your mother will need you some day." But alas! wages are proportioned to the value of the work,

not to the good-will of the workman. The will counts for nothing; it is capacity that is required, and this Jack did not possess. In spite of Labassindre's predictions, he would never be anything but a *chouftiqueur* at his work. In short, he had not the least aptitude for it. And now, though he has reached seventeen years of age and his apprenticeship is ended, he is scarcely able to earn three francs a day. With those three francs, he must pay for food and lodging, and he must clothe himself, — that is, he must replace his smock and overalls with new ones when they have become unfit for wear. A fine trade this which they have given him! And what would he do if some day his mother should write to him, "I am coming — coming to live with you!"

"I tell you, my little lad," said Father Roudic, who still called the apprentice by this diminutive, though the latter was a whole head taller than himself, "your parents were wrong not to listen to me. This is not the work for you. You will never succeed at handling a file, and we shall always be obliged to put you on rough work, at which you can never earn a living. In your place, I would rather knock about a little, and seek my fortune by roughing it. Look here! only the other day in the fitting-shop, Blanchet, chief-engineer of the "Cydnus," came to us, looking for stokers. If the thought of the stoking-room does not scare you, you might try it a while. You would earn your six francs a day and make a tour of the world, lodged, fed, warmed, ay! there's

the rub — warmed! It is rough work, but one gets accustomed to it; for I did it myself for two years, and I am still here. Come! would you like me to write to Blanchet?"

"Yes, Monsieur Roudic, I would like that better."

The thought of receiving double pay, of seeing the world, the love of travelling which was his from childhood, the stories Mâdou had told him, the voyages of the "Bayonnaise" narrated by Monsieur Rivals — all these thoughts finally decided Jack to try stoking, the last resort of so many failures at iron-working, at hammer and anvil; for to be a stoker the only requisites are strength and great power of endurance.

He left Indret one July morning just four years after his arrival.

What a superb day it was!

From the deck of the boat where Jack was standing with Father Roudic, who was bent upon accompanying him, the sight was a striking one.

The river widened at every turn of the paddle-wheel, pushing and spreading its banks apart with all its force, as if already preparing for the moment when it would widen to enter the sea. The air freshened, the trees diminished in height, the two shores, as they became farther apart, appeared flattened, their spreading expanse exposed to the sweep of wind blowing ahead of them. Here and there a pond gleamed among those inland stretches, and smoke rose from the turf pits; thousands of gulls and sea-mews, a whirl of black

and white, skimmed the river, uttering shrill cries. Then all this disappeared, lost in the approaching vastness of the ocean, which suffers no other grandeur beside its own, will permit no vegetation beside the bitter sterility of its waves.

Suddenly the little packet with a single bound entered the sea. How explain otherwise that sudden quiver of its whole frame, that rocking, swaying movement which the water, bathed in dazzling light, set free by the vast sweep of the wind, seemed to continue from wave to wave to the extreme edge of the horizon, — that greenish line where sky and sea appear to meet, closing in from the eager gaze the world that lies beyond!

Jack had never seen the sea. That salt, fresh scent, that breeze which at the rising of the tide fanned every billow, intoxicated him with the first sensations of a voyager.

Yonder on the right, with that huddled appearance of roof-tops showing among the rocks, that characterizes a seaport town, Saint-Nazaire skirted the water's edge, its belfry-tower rising like a sentinel upon the height, its jetty continuing the main street into the ocean. Masts of vessels rose between the houses, intersecting, mingling at a distance, so closely crowded in appearance that a single gust of wind might have blown all this bundle of spars into the shelter of the port. At closer range they appeared taller, larger, and farther apart.

They landed at the jetty. There they learned that the "Cydnus," a great steamer of the Trans-

atlantic Line, was to sail that day, in two or three hours, and that since morning it had lain outside the port. This is the only method thus far discovered to get all the crew on board at the moment of departure, without being obliged to have every pot-house of Saint-Nazaire scoured by the police.

Jack and his companion had no time to see the town, which at this hour was filled with all the stir and animation of market-day, even to the port itself. All along the quay were strewn bundles of green, baskets of fruit, fowls tied pair to pair, beating their wings upon the ground and scolding. Before their wares stood Breton peasants, men and women, swinging their arms and quietly waiting in line for a customer. No haste — not the slightest call to the passer-by. In contrast to these were a crowd of hucksters, their baskets loaded with cravats, pocket-books, pins or rings, who went about noisily among the people, crying their wares. Sailors from every land, petty tradesmen of Saint-Nazaire, wives of laborers or of the clerks of the company were hastening to the market, where the cook of the "Cydnus" had just completed his purchase of provisions. Roudic learned that Blanchet was aboard, and furious because he had not his full number of stokers.

"Make haste, my lad, we are late."

They jumped in a boat and crossed the floating dock, crowded with vessels. Here they saw no longer the river harbor of Nantes, furrowed with boats of all sizes. Only enormous vessels were seen, the calm and repose of a haven; the

noise of hammers came from the graving-dock, and the cackling of fowls that were being put aboard were the only sounds that broke the crystalline sonorous silence which broods above the water. The great steamships of the Transatlantic Line were ranged along the quay, heavy and lifeless shapes, that seemed to sleep while waiting to cross the ocean again. Immense English vessels from Calcutta reared aloft their numerous rows of cabins, their high bows and solid sides covered at that moment with a swarm of sailors busied in painting them. They passed between these motionless masses, beneath which the water assumed the sombre hues of a canal crossing a city between thick walls, its gear of chains and ropes raised and dripping. At last they left the port and cleared the jetty, at the end of which the "Cydnus," getting up steam, was waiting the tide.

A nervous, dry little man in his shirt sleeves, three gold stripes upon his cap, called out something to Jack and Roudic, whose boat lay to alongside the steamer. They could scarcely hear what he said in the tumult and confusion of the hour of departure, but his gestures were quite eloquent. This was Blanchet, the chief-engineer, whom his men called "the *Moco.*" As soon as the noise of stowing away baggage in the open hold subsided a little, and he could make himself heard:

"Come along; this is a pretty business!" he cried with a terrible Southern accent, "I thought you were going to leave me in the lurch."

"It's my fault, old boy," said Roudic, "I wished to come with the lad, and I could n't get off yesterday."

"*Boufre!* He 's long enough, that lad of yours, we shall have to fold him in quarters, if he would lie in the stokers' cabin. But come! *zou!* let us go down quickly, and I will show him his place."

They descended a little winding staircase, with a narrow rail, then a staircase without a rail, another, and still another. Jack had never before seen a transatlantic steamship, and was amazed at the size and depth of this one. They descended into an abyss where eyes accustomed to daylight could at first distinguish neither objects nor people. They were surrounded by utter darkness the darkness of a mine, lighted only by hanging lanterns, and stifling from lack of air and an ever-increasing heat. One last ladder over which they groped their way, and they reached the engine-room, a perfect sweating-house, filled with an atmosphere that was almost insupportable, owing to the damp and oppressive heat, mingled with a strong smell of oil, and floating steam; three or four stories above, through an air-hole appeared a bit of blue sky.

Here all was activity. Engineers, assistants, and apprentices came and went, giving the engines a general inspection to be sure that every part was properly adjusted and in perfect order. The boilers had just been filled, and already they were drawing and rumbling furiously. Iron, copper, and cast-iron, — burnished with boiling oil, shone and sparkled; the extreme cleanliness of the

engines made them look still more ferocious, as if those handles, burning to the touch even of hands enveloped in tow, those incandescent pistons, and knobs set in motion by iron hooks, shone with the fire they absorbed. Jack gazed curiously at the formidable monster. He had seen many such at Indret, but this one appeared still more terrible, possibly because he knew he would be obliged to be near it constantly and to feed it night and day. Here and there, thermometers, manometers, a compass, and an electric dial used in giving orders, were lighted up by the great lamps and their reflectors.

At the end of the engine-room was a little passage, very dark and gloomy, and leading into deeper darkness. "Here are the coal-bunkers," said Blanchet, pointing to a hole yawning in the wall. Beside this hole was another, and in the light of the lantern were seen a few pallets and clothes hanging up. This was where the stokers slept. Jack shuddered at the sight. The Moronval dormitory, the attic of the Roudics, those chance shelters where he had dreamed his childish dreams were palaces in comparison. "And here is the stoking-room," added the *Moco*, pushing open a small door.

Imagine a long, fiery cellar, an alley of the catacombs, glowing with the ruddy reflection of ten furnaces in full combustion. Men almost naked were stirring the fires, clearing the cinder-pans, busily occupied in front of these braziers, which congested their streaming faces. The engine room was stifling, but here it was burning.

"This is your man," said Blanchet to the head stoker, introducing Jack.

"He is just in time," said the other scarcely turning around, "I need some one for the cinders."

"Cheer up, my lad," said Father Roudic, giving his apprentice a hearty grip of the hand.

And at once Jack was set to work at the cinders. All the refuse of the coal that obstructs and clogs the ash-pans is thrown into baskets to be carried up on deck and emptied into the sea. It is hard work, for the baskets are heavy, the ladders steep, and the transition from the pure air to the stifling abyss below is suffocating. The third trip he made, Jack felt his legs give way under him. Unable even to raise his basket, he stood still, powerless to move, covered with a perspiration that robbed him of all his strength; one of the stokers, seeing his condition, took a big flask of brandy from a corner and offered him a drink.

"No, thank you, I do not drink," said Jack.

The other began to laugh.

"You'll change your mind."

"Never," said Jack, and suddenly steadying himself by a superhuman effort, with which the will had far more to do than his muscles, he braced the heavy basket upon his back and bravely ascended.

The scene upon deck was picturesque and animated. The little packet bringing the passengers had just come up, and lay alongside the great steamer. A stream of travellers it brought, a hurrying, bewildered crowd, offering an astonishing diversity of costumes and languages, as if all the

countries of the globe were holding a rendezvous upon that international, mixed, and neutral ground, known as the deck of a ship. All were hastening hither and thither, seeking places. Some were light-hearted, others with eyes still moistened by the tears of a hasty farewell. Upon every face was written some sign of care or of hope, for journeys such as these are most frequently the result of some sudden shock, some sudden change of fortune, and when the traveller takes leave of one continent for another, this frequently signifies the last and final upheaval of destiny. And the mourner often jostles against the lover of adventure upon the deck of a packet-boat, and melancholy mingles with the feverish excitement of the voyage.

It was everywhere, this strange fever, it was in the tumultuous restlessness of the rising tide, in the sudden stir that thrilled the vessel, pulling at her anchor; it was seen in the activity of the little boats surrounding her. The same feverishness was imparted to the curious excited crowd at the jetty, come to say farewell to the voyagers, to follow as far as eye could see, the outlines of some beloved figure, rising upon the narrow space like a dark bar against the horizon. The fever showed itself in the eagerness with which the fishing-boats put out to sea with full sails ready for a night of struggle and danger; and mighty steamers returning, felt it beating against their drooping sails, as if voicing a regret for the fair lands they had left behind.

While the tardiest passengers were embarking

and a bell was ringing on the forward deck, hastening the last baggage-loads, Jack, having emptied his cinders, leaned against the nettings and watched the people, the cabin passengers comfortably ensconced and equipped, the steerage passengers already seated upon their scanty baggage. Where were they going? What chimera were they pursuing? What brutal and cold reality awaited them upon their landing? He was especially interested in one pair, a mother and child; they recalled to him the image of Ida and her little Jack as they looked when they too walked hand in hand. The woman was young, dressed in black, and wrapped in a Mexican *sarape* with big stripes; she had that independence of bearing which the wives of military and naval men acquire, owing to the frequent absences of the husband. The child was dressed in English fashion, so closely resembling the pretty godson of Lord Peambock that he might almost have been mistaken for him.

As they passed close to Jack, both moved aside a little, and the long silk gown was quickly drawn closer that it need not brush against the sleeves of the stoker, black with coal. The movement was scarcely perceptible, but Jack understood what it meant and from that moment it seemed to him that his past, that dear past shared with another, and invoked when his days were dreariest, renounced him, vanished from him forever.

A Marseillaise oath, accompanied by a heavy blow of the fist roused him from his mournful reverie.

"Off with you and down to your work, you cursed dog of a Ponantais stoker!"

It was the *Moco* on his rounds. Jack descended without a word, mortified at this humiliation bestowed in public.

As he set foot on the ladder leading to the stoking-room a long shudder shook the vessel, the steam that had been rumbling since morning, came at regular intervals, the screw was set in motion. They were moving!

Below, the horrors of hell.

Loaded to the very muzzle, liberating visible heat in ruddy gleams, the furnaces devoured the shovelfuls of coal constantly renewed by the stokers, their heads contorted, swollen, and apoplexed under the action of these intense fires. The booming of the ocean could scarcely be distinguished from the roaring of the flames, the sound of the billows mingled with a crackling of sparks, suggesting some inextinguishable conflagration that only increases with every effort to put it out.

"There 's your place!" said the head stoker.

Jack placed himself in front of one of those flaming jaws, that yawned around him, and seemed enlarged and multiplied in the dizziness caused by the first pitching of the ship. He was obliged to hold on to whatever he could grasp, that he need not fall, dropping very quickly the incandescent objects by which he attempted to support himself.

Nevertheless, he worked with all the courage he could muster, but at the end of an hour of this torture and burning heat, he was as one blind,

deafened, choking for breath, suffocated by the blood rushing to his head, his eyes dimmed, and his eyelashes scorched. He did as he saw the others do, and dripping, rushed beneath the long canvas tube through which the outer air falls pouring from the upper deck in torrents. Ah! how good it felt. But almost immediately a cape of ice descended upon his shoulders. The murderous gust of air had stopped his breath, and almost choked him.

"The flask!" he cried in a hoarse voice to the stoker who had offered him a drink.

"There, comrade, I thought you would come to it."

He swallowed a great gulp; it was almost pure alcohol, — but he was so cold that the raw spirits seemed as tasteless and insipid to him as water. After he had drunken, a sensation of warmth and comfort filled him, a sensation that extended even to his nerves and muscles, and increased until it was a sharp burning in his stomach. Fire inside, fire outside, flame upon flame, alcohol upon coal, this is how he is to live henceforth.

There began for him a mad dream of drunkenness and torture, that lasted three years, three sinister years, in which one day was the same as another, the months confused and jumbled together, the seasons scarcely to be known apart in the sweltering heat of the stoking-room.

He crossed unknown zones, whose names were bright, refreshing, and musical to the ear; there were Spanish names, Italian, or French, the child-

ish French of the colonies, but of all these fairy lands he saw neither the sapphire skies nor the emerald islands spread out like rich nosegays on the phosphorescent waves. For him the sea had always the same angry roar, the fire the same violence. And the lovelier each land was, the more intolerable was the stoking-room.

They put into flowery ports bordered by forests of palms, banana groves with their green plumes, purpled hills, and white houses supported with bamboo, but for him everything seemed the color of coal. After he had emptied his cinders, passing barefooted over the quays scorched by the sun and smelling of melted tar, and the black juice of the sugar cane, after he had broken coal and shipped coal, he would fall asleep from sheer exhaustion upon some embankment, or hide himself in some low pot-house, all of them resembling those of Nantes, the hideous witnesses of his first carousal. Here he met other stokers, English, Malay, Nubian, ferocious brutes who were mere stoking machines, and as they had nothing to say to each other, they drank together. For, as a fact, all stokers must drink. Otherwise they could not live.

So he drank!

In that abyss of darkness in which he was plunged there was one ray of light, his mother. In the hiddenmost recess of his wretched existence she was enshrined like a madonna in the dimmest corner of some chapel where every taper has been extinguished. Now that he had grown

to manhood, the mystery of his martyrdom became clearer to him. His respect for Charlotte had changed to tender pity, and he began to love her as men love those for whom they suffer, for whose sins they atone. In his wildest orgies he never forgot the end for which he labored, and with some instinct purely mechanical, saved his sailor's wages. All the lucidity that his besotted condition left in him was fixed upon the one thought that he was working for his mother.

Meanwhile, the distance between them grew ever wider and wider, with the great stretches over which he travelled, and because of that vague oblivion, that indifference which, with time, grows upon exiles and unfortunates. Jack's letters became rarer and rarer, as if each one came from a greater distance. Charlotte's were numerous, and full of gossip, and they awaited him at various halting places, but they spoke of matters quite foreign to the novelty of his situation, and he read them only because they sounded in his ears like music, a distant echo of an undying tenderness. The letters from Étiolles, in general, related to him the episodes of d'Argenton's life. Later, others, dated from Paris, announced a change in their existence, a new establishment on the Quai des Augustins, quite near the Institute. "We are in the intellectual centre," wrote Charlotte. "Monsieur d'Argenton, yielding to the solicitations of his friends, has decided to return to Paris, and found a philosophic and literary review. This will be a means of making his works, so unjustly

ignored, better known, and of making money. But how much exertion it requires, running about, calling upon authors and publishers! We have received a very interesting study from Monsieur Moronval. I am busy helping my poor dear! I have just finished the recopying of his *Daughter of Faust.* You are fortunate, my child, in living so far away from all this excitement. Monsieur d'Argenton is really ill from it all. You must be a big fellow by this time, my Jack. Send me your photograph." Some days later, as they put in at Havana, Jack found a voluminous packet addressed to "Jack de Barancy, stoker on board the 'Cydnus.'" It was the first number of:

THE REVIEW OF THE RACES OF THE FUTURE.

VICOMTE D'ARGENTON, EDITOR.

What we are, and what we shall be.	EDITORIAL.
The Daughter of Faust. Prologue.	VTE. A. D'ARGENTON.
Education in the Colonies.	ÉVARISTE MORONVAL.
The Working Man of the Future.	LABASSINDRE.
Medication by Perfumes.	DR. HIRSCH.
Indiscreet Question Addressed to the Manager of the Opera-house.	L.

The stoker fingered mechanically this collection of inanities, soiling it with his hands, and blackening it as he read. And suddenly, as he saw the names of all his executioners assembled there, displayed upon the glazed delicately-tinted cover, indignation stirred within him, he felt a momentary quiver of anger and rage; from his wretched

den he cried out, brandishing his fists, as if they could see and hear him, "Oh, you wretches, you wretches, see what you have made of me!" But that sudden flash lasted only a moment. The stoking-room and alcohol soon overcame this momentary, rebellious movement, and the debilitated state into which the unfortunate creature sank deeper every day soon overcast his existence with a dull, dreary grayness, as the sand of the desert heaped upon the caravans fleeing before it, buries them grain by grain, until guides and horses are wrapped as in a shroud, though they still preserve the appearance of life.

Strangely enough, as his brain grew more torpid each day, and his will lost its energy, his body, excited, sustained, and fed by constant drinking, seemed to become more vigorous. His gait was as firm, the energy with which he worked was as great in drunkenness as in a normal condition, so accustomed he was to the poison, and hardened to its external effects; his features, though pale and convulsed, wore an impenetrable expression, stiffened by the effort of a man who compels his drunkenness to maintain a firm front, and condemns it to silence. Attending strictly to his work, inured to all its terrors, he endured with the same indifference the long and uniform days of the voyage, and the hours of storm, those battles with the sea that seem so dismal in the stoking-room when a leak is sprung or flames burst forth, and the burning coal rolls across the hold. For him these terrible moments were confusedly min-

gled with his ordinary dreams, delirious fancies, and the nightmares peopled with horrid shapes that torture the sleep of the drunkard.

Was it a part of one of those dreams, that terrific shock felt through the entire length of the "Cydnus" one night while the poor stoker was asleep? That sharp, direct blow upon the steamer's sides, that awful din followed by a sound of cracking and breaking, that roar of water rushing in, the sea falling in cataracts, running away in slender rivulets, the hurried footsteps, electric bells answering each other, excitement and terror, cries, and, more ominous than aught else, the stoppage of the screw, leaving the ship abandoned to the silent tossing of her roll; was not all this a dream? — His comrades shake him, call — "Jack! Jack!" He springs up — half-naked. The engine-room has already two feet of water. The compass is broken, the lamps extinguished, the dials overturned. Men are talking to each other, seeking each other in the darkness and the mud. "What is the matter? What has happened?"

"An American vessel has run into us. We are sinking. Run for your lives."

But at the top of the narrow ladder towards which stokers and mechanics are rushing, stands the *Moco*, erect, revolver in hand.

"The first man who attempts to leave the ship I shoot on the spot. Back to your stoking, in God's name, and work your hardest. Land is not far away. We may reach it perhaps."

Every man returns to his post, and exerts him-

self with all the fury of despair. The stoking-room is a terrible place; the furnaces, loaded to bursting, send out a cloud of damp smoke, a blinding, yellow, suffocating stench that asphyxiates the workers, and the water, constantly gaining, in spite of the pumps, freezes them in every limb. Oh! how happy they who can die above, on deck, in the open air, but here is black Death between two great walls of cast-iron; hopeless indeed is this paralyzed struggle against its power.

All is over. The pumps will not work. The furnaces are out. The water is up to the shoulders of the stokers, and this time it is the *Moco* himself who cries in a voice of thunder: "Run for your lives, boys!"

IX.

THE RETURN.

ON the Quai des Augustins, a peaceful, narrow quay bordered on one side by bookstores, on the other by second-hand bookstalls, stood an old-fashioned house of the eighteenth century, with heavy arched portals, and in it was located the *Review of the Races of the Future.*

The choice of this retired quarter of Paris for the *Review* had not been left to chance. In Paris a newspaper or publication of any sort is generally founded in the location that is most in keeping with it. In the heart of Paris, upon the great Boulevards, magazines, and fashionable journals display their tinted covers like the latest novelty in dress-goods. In the Latin Quarter, insignificant papers of passing importance alternate with illustrated ballads and the erudite fronts of medical publications. But compact and serious reviews with an aim, a mission, choose the quiet, claustral streets, where the bustle and stir of Paris does not disturb their laborious lucubrations.

The Review of the Races of the Future, a free-lance and humanitarian publication, was admirably located upon this quay musty with the atmosphere of old books, and "in the neighborhood of the Institute," as Charlotte observed. And the house

itself, with its balconies blackened with age, its worm-eaten fronton, its broad staircase with dusty, mouldy carved railings, was quite in keeping with the spirit of the *Review*. But less harmonious in appearance were the physiognomies and bearing of its editors.

The *Future Races* had been founded six months before, and ever since, the terrified concierge had seen crossing the threshold of his stronghold the dirtiest, most eccentric and lamentable-looking crowd that ever found shelter in literary Bohemia. "We have everything, from negroes even to Chinamen," the unhappy Cerberus confided to his colleagues of the Quai des Augustins; and I suspect that he had in mind Moronval, one of the most assiduous supporters of the *Review*, who always came escorted by some of the "little tropicals." But Moronval was not the only one who haunted the venerable house that had become the rendezvous of many a provincial and Parisian Failure — unfortunates who go through life having somewhere about them always some manuscript too large for their scanty overcoats.

A Failure who had founded a *Review*, a review with money back of it, with shareholders — what a godsend! It is true that shareholders were wanting. Thus far there had been but two, d'Argenton, of course, and later — our friend Jack. Do not smile, Jack was really a shareholder in the *Review of the Races of the Future*. He was set down for ten thousand francs upon the books — those ten thousand francs of *Bon ami*. Charlotte had some

conscientious scruples at this disposal of the funds she was to pass over to her child at his majority, but she had yielded to d'Argenton's reasoning.

"Come! Do try to understand a little. It is a magnificent investment. Figures are figures. Look at the value shares of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* have reached! Is there another investment like that? I do not say that we shall realize any such profits as those in a day, but if we can only make a quarter of them, that will be a better investment than the Funds, or railway shares. Have I hesitated to invest my own capital in this affair?"

Realizing, no one better than she, the miserliness of her poet, his last argument was unanswerable.

In six months d'Argenton had sacrificed more than thirty thousand francs upon rent, offices, and editors, in addition to the money he had advanced for work he had not yet received. At this time there were no funds remaining after the first outlay, and he was obliged, so he said, to make another appeal to his shareholders, for he had invented the pretext of shareholders to protect himself against borrowers.

In fact, while there had been no receipts thus far, the expenses were very heavy. In addition to the offices of the *Review*, the poet had rented on the fourth story of the house a fine large apartment with a balcony from which could be seen a view of that striking horizon bounded by the Cité, the Seine, Notre Dame, domes, and spires; car-

riages were seen driving across the bridges, and boats passing under their arches. Here at least he could live and breathe freely. Quite different from that out-of-the way corner of Les Aulnettes, where a bumble-bee crossing the poet's study every afternoon at three o'clock, was awaited as the event of the day. Impossible to work in such a benumbing atmosphere! And to think that he had been so courageous as to shut himself up there for six years! And what had been the result? It had taken him six years to write his *Daughter of Faust*, while, since his arrival in Paris, thanks to his intellectual environment, he had begun all sorts of essays, leading articles, and stories.

Charlotte, too, had her share in the feverish activity of her poet. Always young and fresh, she superintended all the domestic arrangements, which was no small affair, owing to the horde of diners-out who gathered daily at her table. She also shared the poet's labors.

To aid digestion, it was his custom to dictate instead of writing, and as Charlotte wrote a fine English hand, she assisted him as secretary. Every evening when they dined alone, he would dictate for an hour while he promenaded the room. In the sleepy, old house his steps resounded, and the tones of his solemn voice mingled with another gentle, tender, admiring voice that seemed to make the responses to the officiating pontiff.

"That is our author composing," said the concierge respectfully.

Upon the evening when we meet the d'Argentons again, they are in a charming little sitting-room redolent of green tea and Spanish cigarettes. Charlotte is preparing her table for writing, setting out methodically the most improved and modern of inkstands, an ivory pen-holder, gold-dust, and fine sheets of white paper with broad margins for corrections, a useless precaution, since the poet never corrects his works, but leaves it all to chance, unpolished, and without the least revision. But the pages look so much prettier with margins, and in all that concerned her poet, Charlotte gave her love of elegance free play.

Upon this special evening d'Argenton is in his happiest vein; he feels that he could dictate all night, and wishes to take advantage of the opportunity to write a sentimental story destined to charm the subscribers into a renewal of their subscriptions. He twirls his moustache, where a few white hairs are beginning to show themselves, and raises his big forehead which seems even higher than before, as he is growing bald. He is waiting for inspiration. As is not infrequent, even among a united pair, Charlotte's attitude presents a striking contrast to his; she is dejected; her bright eyes are clouded. She is pale, absent-minded, but docile as ever, for in spite of her evident fatigue, she has already dipped her pen in the ink, her little finger delicately raised in the air, like a kitten afraid of soiling its paws.

"Come, Lolotte, are you ready? We begin with Chapter I. Have you written 'Chapter I.'?"

"'Chapter I.'" repeats Charlotte, mournfully.

The poet looks at her with some annoyance, then begins, evidently determined not to question her, or to know the cause of her sadness:

"*In a remote valley of the Pyrenees, those Pyrenees so rich in legendary lore*—"

This phrase, upon repetition, enchants him. He repeats it again and again with various modulations of satisfied pride, then, turning to Charlotte:

"Have you written '*so rich in legendary lore*'?"

She attempts to repeat "So ri—, so ri—ich in legendary lore," but stops short, her voice broken by sobs.

Charlotte weeps. She has bitten her pen, pressed her lips together to restrain her tears, but in vain; they overflow, and she weeps and weeps.

"Come, come," says the amazed d'Argenton, "that is always the way. On an evening when I was just in the mood! What is the matter now? Is it that news of the 'Cydnus'? Can't you understand it is merely a rumor? You know what the papers are. They jump at anything that will fill their columns. To be without news of a ship is no unusual thing. Besides, Hirsch was to call at the company's office to-day. He will be here soon, and you will learn the truth. It will be time enough then to make yourself miserable."

He speaks to her in a contemptuous, dryly condescending tone, as one talks to the weak, to children, imbeciles, and invalids. Is she not

a little of all these? When he has calmed her, he asks:

"Where were we? I have lost the thread. Re-read to me all I have dictated — all!"

Charlotte restrains her tears, and begins for the tenth time.

"*In a remote valley of the Pyrenees, those Pyrenees so rich in legendary lore —*"

"Go on."

She vainly turns the page over and over, and shakes the new sheets of paper.

"That is all," she says at last.

D'Argenton is very much surprised; he had thought there was a great deal more. This is what always happens when he dictates. His thought moves so much faster than its expression that the latter eludes him. He believes that he has realized and formulated all those imaginings of his brain that exist there in an embryonic state; and when he has contented himself with making a few grandiloquent gestures, and sputtered a few phrases, he is startled to discover how little he has produced, how disproportionate the dream to the reality. Disillusion of Don Quixote, who had fancied himself in the empyrean, mistaking for the freer air the breath of scullions and kitchen-bellows blowing around him, and upon his wooden horse, suffering all the effects of an imaginary fall! D'Argenton too had thought himself started, carried up, lifted to the skies. What! all those thrills, that fevered exaltation, so many poses, attitudes, such pacings

back and forth, running his hands through his hair again and again, and the only result those two lines:

"*In a remote valley of the Pyrenees, those Pyrenees,*" etc. It is always thus.

He is furious, for he feels that he is ridiculous.

"It is all your fault," he tells Charlotte. "Perhaps you think it is an easy thing to work face to face with some one who is continually crying. Oh, this is horrible. A whole world of ideas and conceptions, and nothing comes of them, nothing, nothing! Time passes, the years roll by, and every place is filled. Wretched woman, will you never learn how trifling a thing can kill inspiration. Oh, to be ever bruising oneself against some stupid reality! I who to compose ought to live in a crystal tower a thousand feet above all the futilities of life, have for my only companions, caprice, disorder, childishness and noise."

He stamps his feet, and deals the table a blow with his fist, while Charlotte, who has not wept enough to relieve her overflowing heart, her tears still falling, gathers up pens, penwiper, penholder, and all the paraphernalia of secretary, scattered about the sitting-room.

The arrival of Doctor Hirsch puts an end to this lamentable scene, which is of such frequent occurrence that every atom of the house is accustomed to it, and after the thunderbolts of wrath have descended, and the storm is passed, everything resumes its ordinary appearance of harmony and tranquillity. The doctor is not alone; Labass-

indre accompanies him, and both enter mysteriously, wearing an air of extraordinary gravity. The singer especially, accustomed to stage effects, has a manner of closing his lips hermetically and raising his head, an air that seems to say, "I have intelligence of the utmost importance, but nothing in the world would induce me to reveal it."

D'Argenton, still trembling with rage, does not understand the meaning of these vigorous and significant handshakes, which his friends bestow upon him so lavishly, without a word. But Charlotte speaks and brings him to the point.

"Well, Monsieur Hirsch?" she says, rushing towards the fantastic doctor.

"Still the same answer, madame. There is no news."

But even as he says, "no news" to Charlotte, his eyes inordinately wide open, stare through his bulging spectacles at d'Argenton in a fashion that says he is lying frightfully, that there is indeed news, and terrible news.

"And what do they think at the company's office? What do they say?" asks the mother, desiring yet fearing to know all, and striving to read the truth in those grimacing faces.

"Well, well! Madame—*beûh! beûh!*"

While Labassindre grows more and more entangled in a series of weak, long-winded phrases, vaguely reassuring, but extremely dubious, Hirsch with a twisting movement of the lips according to the Decostère method, has succeeded in giving the poet the configuration of these words:

"'Cydnus' lost, with all aboard. Collision on the open sea, near Cape Verde. Awful!"

D'Argenton's great moustache has quivered, but that is all. Looking at that sallow face with its smooth and regular features, where not so much as a wrinkle betrays his emotions, it would be hard to say what his feelings are, or to know whether triumph or tardy remorse are uppermost in his mind at learning this frightful *dénouement*. Perhaps both emotions are struggling beneath those impassive and inscrutable features.

But the poet feels he must get out-of-doors, and work off the excitement that this great news causes him.

"I have worked enough," he says very solemnly to his friends; "I must take the air. Let us go out for a turn."

"That is right," says Charlotte. "Go out for a while. It may do you good."

Charlotte is usually reluctant to let her "artist" leave her side, because she fancies that all the ladies of the Faubourg Saint-Germain are informed of his return, and eager to number themselves among those who would "drain his heart's blood;" but this evening is an exception, and she is glad to see him go, and to be left alone with her thoughts. She would weep in peace, with no one attempting to console her, abandon herself completely to that dread, those presentiments she dares not confess because she fears the brutality that will attempt to reassure her regarding them.

Even the presence of the servant disturbs her,

and instead of the usual gossip that marks monsieur's going-out, the girl is sent up to bed.

"Does madame wish to remain alone? Is not madame afraid? The wind moans dreadfully out on the balcony."

"No, leave me. I am not afraid."

At last she is alone, and may be silent for a moment, free to think without hearing her tyrant's: "What are you thinking about?" What is she thinking about? Of Jack! And what are her thoughts? Ever since the day when she had read that ominous line in the paper, "No news of the 'Cydnus,'" the image of her child pursues her, distracts, haunts her. In the daytime the all-absorbing egotism of the poet drives away these agonizing thoughts, but at night she cannot sleep. She hears the wind tossing without, and it fills her with a strange terror. At the corner of the quay where they live it blows from every point, now angry, now plaintive; it shakes the old wainscotings, rattles the heavy panes, and beats against an unfastened shutter. But whether its voice is a shriek or a whisper, it talks to her incessantly; it tells her the message which, spoken in the ear of the sailor's wife, the sailor's mother, drives the color from her cheeks.

It has come from far away, the tempest-blast, it has rushed on and seen many things, had many a wild adventure! On the broad sweep of its wings, which it beats like a wild bird against everything it passes, it bears many a rumor, many a cry, and carries them all with equal rapidity.

Sometimes it plays mirthful pranks, sometimes it is terrible; at the same moment it will tear the sail of a boat, put out a candle, raise a mantilla, herald a hurricane, and feed a fire, and the tale of all it has done gives its voice those joyous or wailing intonations.

But this night there is something sinister in the sound. It sweeps across the balcony, shakes the windows, and whistles under the doors. It will enter; it must have some urgent message to give this mother, and the cries it makes at the windows and hurls against the pane, shaking its dripping wings, resound like an appeal or a warning. The stroke of neighboring clocks, the distant whistle of some train — every sound assumes the same plaintive, persistent, and haunting voice. She fancies she knows only too well what the wind would say to her. It would tell her that it saw in mid-ocean, for it is everywhere at once, a great ship struggling against the waves; its sides were crushed in, its masts lost; it rolled about in that abyss of waters, and arms were outstretched to Heaven, and blanched, wild faces with streaming locks were there, and eyes gazed madly; there were shrieks and sobs, and last farewells, and curses pierced the gate of Death. Her hallucination is so vivid that she fancies she hears among the rumors which reach her from that distant shipwreck a vague, scarcely articulate wail:

"Mother!"

Doubtless some fancy, a delusion of her troubled brain.

"Mother!"

This time the plaint sounds a little louder; but no, it cannot be possible! It must be some ringing in her ears. O God! is she going mad? To dispel this startling obsession, Charlotte rises and walks about the room. Perhaps some one was calling. The sound seems to come from the stairway, and she hastens to open the door.

The gas is out, and the lamp she holds in her hands throws upon the steps the shadow of the carved railing. She can see nothing, no one. Yet she is sure she heard a voice. She must look again. She leans forward and raises the lamp as high as she can. Then a low, stifled sound, between a sob and a laugh, is heard upon the stairs and a tall shadowy form drags itself along, clinging to the wall.

"Who is there?" she cries, trembling in every limb, and thrilled with a mad hope that dispels all fear.

"It is I, mother. Oh, I can see you," a hoarse, weak voice replies.

She quickly descends a few steps. It is he, her Jack, this tall, wounded workman, supporting himself upon crutches, almost fainting, and so overcome with the thought of seeing his mother again, that he is obliged to stop midway on the stairs, uttering that cry of distress. And this is what she has made of her child!

Not a word, a cry, or even a caress! The two stand face to face at last, and, gazing at each other, they weep silently.

A certain fatality seems to pursue some men, making all their manifestations futile or absurd. It must be admitted that d'Argenton, the King of the Failures, never succeeded in producing an effect he had planned. As he was returning that evening he had resolved, after a lengthy conference with his friends, to break the fatal news to Charlotte, to have the worst over with at once, and to meet her first outburst with the aid of such solemn phrases as the occasion seemed to demand. But what was his surprise, at that late hour, to find Charlotte still up, and to see near the fire the remains of one of those hastily devoured meals improvised during the emotion that attends a departure or an arrival!

She came towards him, all a-flutter with excitement.

"Hush! don't make a noise. He is there. He is asleep. Oh, how happy I am!"

"Who? What?"

"Why, Jack! He has been shipwrecked. He is wounded. His ship was lost. He escaped by a miracle. He has just arrived from Rio Janeiro, and spent two months in the hospital."

D'Argenton made an attempt at a smile, expressive perhaps of satisfaction. To do him justice, he took the situation quite paternally, and was the first to declare that Jack must not leave them until he had completely regained his strength. In conscience he could not do less for his principal, his only shareholder. Shares to

the value of ten thousand francs certainly merited some consideration.

After the first excitement had subsided, and the first days had passed, the daily life of the poet and Charlotte resumed its usual tenor, the only addition to it being the presence of the poor cripple, whose legs, burned by a boiler explosion, healed very slowly. Clad in his blue woollen pea-jacket, his face still blackened from stoking, his features swollen and sunburnt, with reddened, lashless lids, inflamed face, some light bristles of a moustache the color of ripened corn, his cheeks hollowed, his whole body expressing that lassitude and discouragement and torpor that follow upon a great catastrophe, the godson of Lord Peambock, Ida's Jack (with a K) dragged himself about from chair to chair, to the great annoyance of d'Argenton and the still greater shame of his mother.

When some stranger entered the house, and she would intercept an astonished and curious glance directed towards this idle workman, whose manner and speech contrasted so strangely with the quiet luxury of her home, she would hastily remark: "Let me introduce my son. He has been very ill," just as mothers of infirm children hasten to declare their maternity, fearing to surprise upon the face of another the too obvious smile or glance of pity. But if she suffered at sight of the condition into which Jack had fallen, if she blushed at the vulgarity, the grossness even, of his manners, at his way of sitting at table, which

spoke too plainly of the public-house and the gluttony of a hireling, she suffered far more deeply because of the contemptuous tone affected by all the frequenters of the house, in addressing her child.

Jack had met again all his former acquaintances of the Gymnase, all the Failures of *Parva domus* a few years older, having lost a few teeth and some hairs, but immovable in their social positions, and treading the same treadmill still, like the brave Failures that they were. They assembled daily in the offices of the *Review* to discuss the next number, and twice a week they had a grand dinner on the fourth story. D'Argenton, who could not exist without an audience, concealed his foible even from himself in that astounding phraseology of which he had the secret.

"We must combine, form a group, press closer, elbow to elbow." And how they did elbow each other! They squeezed so close, they elbowed him so that he was almost smothered. And in all the group, the one whose elbows he felt most, — pointed, bony, insinuating elbows they were, — the Failure who elbowed him most persistently, was Évariste Moronval, secretary of the *Review of the Races of the Future.* It was Moronval who had first suggested the idea of this review, and to him it owed its palingenetic and humanitarian title. He corrected the proofs, supervised the setting up of the pages, read articles and romances, and, in short, with his burning utterances, revived the failing courage of the director, who was waver-

ing in his zeal, owing to the persistent indifference of the subscribers, and the incessant expenses of the magazine.

For these numerous services the mulatto received a very small stipend, which he contrived to increase by various supplementary labors paid apart and by continual loans. The Gymnase Moronval had failed long before, but its director had not abandoned entirely his plan of educating the "little tropicals," and when he visited the office of the *Review*, was always accompanied by the two last specimens that remained to him of that eccentric system of culture. One was a little Japanese prince, a young man of uncertain age, that might be anywhere between fifteen and fifty; without his long mikado robe, he seemed very small and lean, and when he appeared with a tiny cane and a very small hat, looked like a little yellow clay figure that had tumbled from some whatnot on to the Parisian sidewalk.

The other was a tall fellow, of whose features only the forehead and narrow eyes could be seen, for the rest disappeared behind the stiff and bloated face, bearded with a black growth as curly as rosewood-shavings; he recalled vaguely to Jack some one he had known, and he soon recognized his old friend Saïd through the aid of certain cigar-butts which the Egyptian did not fail to offer him upon one of their first interviews. The education of this unfortunate youth had ended long since, but his parents had left him with Moronval to be initiated into the usages and

customs of polite society. With this exception, all the *habitués* of the quarters belonging to the *Review*, all the bi-weekly diners-out, the mulatto, Hirsch, Labassindre, the nephew of Berzelius, and the rest, assumed towards Jack a patronizing, condescending, familiar tone. A stranger might have thought him to be some poor devil admitted by favor to the table of a wealthy employer.

He was still "Monsieur Jack" for one person only, the gentle and kindly Madame Moronval, who had herself remained unchanged, with her big, shiny, solemn forehead, and her little black gown which, though less solemn than before, was shinier than ever. But it was all the same to him, whether they called him "Monsieur Jack," "old chap," "my man," or "my boy;" what did their contempt, or friendliness, or indifference matter to this poor nonentity who sat apart, a pipe stuck between his teeth, stupefied and falling asleep as he listened to the literary wrangling that had so often made him drowsy in childhood. His two months in the hospital, his three years of drunkenness and stoking, and the final catastrophe of all had produced in him a state of torpor and fatigue that made him unwilling to speak or stir, made him seek for a silence and tranquillity which should efface that sound of the sea's fury and the roaring of engines, — two noises that still mingled in his brain, like the chant of the sea in the hollow of a shell.

"He is completely brutalized," d'Argenton would say at times. Not so; but in a somnolent,

dumb state, without volition, enjoying nothing now but the immobility of the earth under his feet and the peace of the sky overhead. He revived a little at times, but only upon those rare afternoons when the poet was away. Then he would draw closer to her, and show some slight animation, while he listened to her birdlike prattle, her little loving phrases. But he preferred listening to her, to talking himself. Her voice filled his ears with a delicious murmur, like that of the first bees in summer in the honey-time.

One day while they were both seated together, he suddenly awoke from a long torpor and said slowly, very slowly, to Charlotte:

"When I was a child I must have made a long voyage, did I not?"

She looked at him, embarrassed a little. It was the first time in his life that he had ever questioned her about the past.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because the first day I set foot upon the steamer I had a singular sensation. It seemed to me that all I saw there I had seen before, — the daylight coming through the light-ports, those little stairs cased in brass, — all brought back some memory to me. It seemed to me that when I was very young I had played, slipped upon those stairs. One sometimes feels like that in a dream."

She looked around several times, to assure herself that they were alone.

"You were not dreaming, my Jack. You were three years old when we came back from Algeria. Your father had died very suddenly, and we were returning to Touraine."

"Ah! then my father died in Algeria?"

"Yes," she answered in a low voice, bending her head.

"What was my father's name?"

She hesitated and was very much disconcerted. She had not been prepared for this sudden burst of curiosity, and yet, embarrassing as the conversation was to her, she could not refuse to divulge his father's name to a young man of twenty, old enough to hear and to understand everything.

"His was one of the greatest names of France, my child, a name which you and I would bear to-day if a frightful and sudden catastrophe had not prevented him from repairing his fault. Ah, we were very young when we first met; I remember, — it was at a wild-boar hunt in the ravines of Chiffa. I must tell you that at that time I had a perfect passion for hunting. I even remember that I rode a little Arab horse named Soliman, a perfect little devil."

The scatterbrained creature had started off at full speed upon her Arab horse named Soliman, across that country of chimeras which she peopled with all the Lord Peambocks and rajahs of Singapore her dazzling fancy had created. Jack did not attempt to interrupt, for he knew that it was quite useless; but when she paused to take breath, suffocated by the wind and the speed of her flight,

he took advantage of that brief pause to return to his first question, and to pin that mind, so prompt at flying off, to a positive question.

"What was my father's name?" he repeated.

Oh! the startled look in those clear eyes! She had quite forgotten of what they had been speaking.

Still breathless from the rambling story with which she had been so busy a moment before, she replied quickly, "He was the Marquis de l'Épan, major in the Third Hussars."

It is to be feared Jack did not cherish his mother's illusions with regard to the nobility, its rights and prerogatives, for he heard with the utmost composure the secret of his illustrious birth. After all, if his father had been a marquis, this had not hindered his becoming a stoker, and a poor stoker at that, — as broken-down and useless now as the boiler of the "Cydnus" itself, lying at the bottom of the ocean, under six hundred fathoms of water. If his father had borne a high-sounding name, his own name was merely Jack, and he was one of those sad shipwrecks of chance rolled about homeless upon the ever-changing current of life. Besides, the father of whom she spoke was dead, and that sudden awakening of an unfamiliar emotion that had stirred him for a moment, finding nothing to anchor upon, once his curiosity had been satisfied, relapsed into a state of torpor with all his other faculties.

"Really, Charlotte, we must do something

with this fellow. He cannot remain here forever, doing nothing; his legs are better now. He eats like an ox; no fault in that. He still coughs a little, but Hirsch says he will have that cough always. He ought to decide upon something now. If stoking is too hard for him, he might get employment on the railroad. Labassindre says that the pay is excellent."

At these representations of the poet, Charlotte offered in objection that Jack was still very weak, much prostrated.

"If you could hear how he pants when he reaches the fourth story! if you could see how thin he is! I heard him tossing about the other night. Do you know, while he is waiting to grow a little stronger, you might find him something to do upon the *Review.*"

"Very well," replied the other; "I will speak about it to Moronval."

Moronval was perfectly willing, but the experiment was not a fortunate one. Jack, for a few days took the place of office-boy on the *Review.* He carried the proofs to the printer, folded the magazines, gummed the wrappers; he was made to do everything except sweep the two rooms, and this, for decency's sake, was left to the *concierge,* whose prerogative it was. With the same impassibility as before, Jack fulfilled these varied functions, enduring the contemptuous allusions of Moronval, who had many a grudge of his own to satisfy, the icy ill-humor of d'Argenton, whose temper was becoming more sour every day, be-

cause the subscribers resisted all his efforts. They certainly held out very obstinately, these subscribers. Upon the book in which were to be inscribed the names of the pioneers of the enterprise — a magnificent affair bound in green serge and decorated with brass corners — only a single name was to be found, and that looked quite lost upon the first page, like a black shell upon an immense desert ocean. *Monsieur le Comte de ——, Mettray, near Tours.* It was Charlotte to whom the register owed that name.

But the absence of receipts did not prevent the expenses from continuing, nor the contributors from presenting themselves the fifth of every month to be paid for their work, and a little more in advance. Moronval especially was insatiable. After he had gone himself, he would send his wife, Saïd, or the Japanese *prince*. D'Argenton was furious, but he dared not refuse. His vanity was inordinate, and the mulatto had so many sweets in his pocket for its delectation; but when his staff was penniless, fearing they might attempt to follow Moronval's example, he never failed to lament, and to oppose every borrower with an argument that offered an insurmountable obstacle, "My committee of shareholders refuse absolutely." His "committee of shareholders" stood in a corner meanwhile, — a committee quite unconscious of the honor, and composed of a single member, who was occupied in making wrappers with a brush and a pot of paste. For as there was but one subscriber to the *Review, Bon ami,*

it had but one shareholder, Jack, with the money of *Bon ami.*

Neither Jack nor any one else suspected this, but d'Argenton knew it, and it made him embarrassed and ashamed to face this youth, who was Charlotte's son as well, and his old hatred revived.

At the end of a week the office-boy was declared incapable.

"He is not of the slightest use; instead of aiding, he is a bother to every one."

"But, my dear, I assure you he does all he can."

She felt more courageous than of old in his defence, since the terrible fright she had experienced.

"Well, what do you want me to do? How can I explain it to you? He annoys me. He is not at home with us. He does not know how to behave at table. He is not in his right element here. He does not know how to speak or to sit down. You do not see how he sits at dinner, his legs spread out, always a mile away from the table, as if he were falling asleep over his plate. And then to see such a big fellow constantly at your side ages you, my dear. Besides, he has such deplorable habits. He drinks, I tell you; he drinks. He brings back the smell of the public-house with him. To speak plainly, he is a workman."

She bent her head and wept. She, too, had noticed that he drank. But whose fault was it?

Had they not themselves plunged him into this abyss?

"Let us see, Charlotte. I have an idea. Since he is too weak to return to work, we will send him to Étiolles to recuperate. He can remain a while in the country, in the fresh air, and aid us perhaps in sub-letting *Parva domus*, which remains on our hands, under a ten-years' lease. We will send him a little money — all that he needs. It will do him good."

She flung her arms about his neck in a transport of gratitude.

"Indeed, indeed, you are always the best of men."

And it was decided then and there that she should go the following morning to see her son settled at Les Aulnettes.

They reached it upon one of those lovely autumn mornings, hazy and golden, that recall summer, but with its heavy, burning heat subdued, lessened. Not a breath stirred the air, but it was filled with the songs of birds, the crackling of fallen leaves, the fragrance of ripened things, of dried hay, of parched heather, of fruit ready to be gathered. Dim woodland paths were seen dotted with yellow flowers; they offered less shade than in summer, for their foliage had begun to thin, but the sun's rays had grown milder. In velvety silence path upon path stretched towards the glades. Jack recognized them all, and as he set foot upon them again, he regained possession of the happy, never-to-be-forgotten days of childhood, when, in spite

of the false position in which he lived, he had felt his whole being expand in the blessed freedom of Nature. And Nature herself seemed to recognize him, to call and welcome him. Speaking to his soul, which melted within him at all these memories, his emotion heightened by physical weakness, Jack heard a gentle, consoling voice that said: "Come unto me, poor child, come to my heart, and listen to its slow, calm beating. I will clasp thee in my embrace, and care for thee. I have balm for every wound, and who seeks me is already healed."

Charlotte left her son early in the day, and the little house, all its windows open to the soft air, drank in the hum of the deserted garden, in which fruit and flowers mingled in that sudden blossoming of late autumn, — the little house which Jack ran over from room to room, stooping a little to seek in every corner the crumbs of his vanished childhood; for the first time, and without touch of irony, merited the inscription above its door:

"Little house, great repose."

PART III.

I.

CÉCILE.

"BUT that was really slanderous! You have a right to prosecute Hirsch for it, the scoundrel! To leave me five years under the impression that my friend Jack was a thief! Oh, the blackguard! He came here expressly to tell me that news; he could easily have returned to deny it after your innocence was known to all, and proclaimed in such very flattering and eloquent terms. Come, show me your certificate again."

"Here it is, Monsieur Rivals.'"

"It is fine. It would have been hard to make better amends for an unintentional wrong. That manager is a man, every inch of him. Ah well, I am delighted. It used to torture me to believe that my pupil had become a scamp, and to think that if I had not run across you by chance at the Archambaulds' it might have been many a long day before I would have known the truth."

For it was in the gamekeeper's little house that Monsieur Rivals had discovered his former friend.

During the ten days he had spent at Les Aulnettes, Jack had lived like a contemplative Brahmin, plunged in the great silence of Nature,

drinking in those beautiful days of late autumn, basking in the mellow sunshine, never leaving the house except to plunge into the living calm of the forest. The trees gave him their strength, the earth its vigor, and sometimes in shaking his head, striving to arouse thought there, it seemed to him that he had lost some of the ugliness of his invalid and convict-like appearance under that clear, pure, deep sky, whose tranquil rays seemed to light an infinite transparency.

The only human beings whom he met were the Archambaulds, of whom he had retained pleasant recollections. The wife reminded him of his mother, whom she had served affectionately and faithfully for so many years. The man, a kindly giant, silent and shy, absorbed like a faun in the vegetation of the forest, evoked for him that past when they had had such delicious, invigorating rambles together. He lived his childhood over again with these two solitaries. The woman brought him bread and provisions, and often when he was too lazy to return home, he would cook some simple repast for himself in the ashes of their hearth. He would remain there, seated upon a bench before the door, smoking his pipe at the gamekeeper's side. These people never questioned him, but at sight of his inflamed cheekbones and the emaciation of his tall figure, Father Archambauld would indulge in many a sad shake of the head, just as he did at sight of his beech-trees invaded by weevils.

That day, when he arrived at the house of his

friends, he found the husband sick in bed, with a violent attack of rheumatism of the joints; two or three times a year it prostrated this Colossus, laying him low, like a tree struck by lightning. Standing at his bedside was a little man in a long overcoat, whose skirts, full of papers and books, beat against his legs, and whose fine white mane was all rumpled. It was Monsieur Rivals.

The interview was embarrassing at first. Jack felt ashamed at finding himself again face to face with the old doctor, whose gloomy predictions he remembered. Monsieur Rivals, attributing his confusion to the knowledge of the theft he had committed, was very distant. But in spite of everything, the weak condition of this big fellow touched him. They left together, returning on foot through the little green byways of the forest; talking together, and passing from path to path, and from one vague detail to another more precise, they at last reached the edge of the woods and a complete explanation of their misunderstanding.

Monsieur Rivals was exultant, indefatigable in reading and re-reading the certificate in which the manager of the factory had testified to the error of the accusation.

"Well, now, since you are settled in the country, I hope we shall see you oftener. First of all, it is absolutely necessary. They have sent you to the woods, as one turns a horse out to grass, but that is not enough. You need care, great care, especially during the season we are entering

upon. Deuce take it! Étiolles is not Nice. You know you used to be very fond of the house. It is the same as ever. But my poor wife is there no longer. She died four years ago, of sorrow and despair, for she never really rallied from our misfortune. Fortunately I had the little one to take her place, otherwise I do not know what would have become of me. Cécile keeps the books and attends to the pharmacy. Ah, but she will be glad to see you! Come! when shall it be?"

Jack hesitated in answering. Monsieur Rivals, as if reading his thoughts, added with a laugh:

"You know it won't be necessary to bring her your certificate to be sure of a warm welcome. I never told her or the mother anything about that affair. They loved you too much. It would have made them very unhappy. There has never been the shadow of a misunderstanding between you, and you may present yourself without fear. Let us see! The weather is too cold for you to dine with us to-day. The fog would do you no good. But I count upon you to-morrow morning for lunch. Nothing is changed, and we lunch at noon, or at two or three o'clock, according to my visits. It is even worse than it used to be, for that confounded beast of mine is growing old, and is more dawdling and imbecile than ever. We have a quarrel every day of our lives. There now, you are home again; get in quickly. To-morrow without fail! If you don't come, I'll go and fetch you."

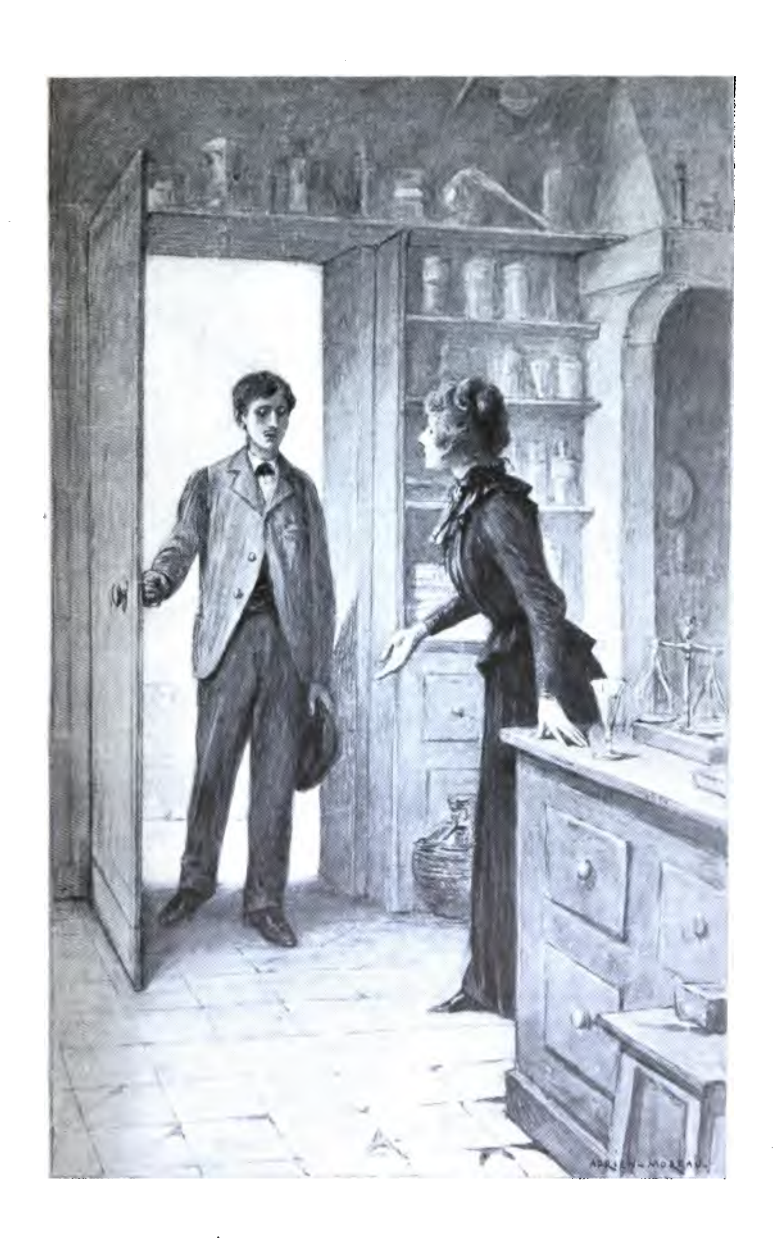
As he closed the door of the house, blocked by creepers, Jack felt a peculiar sensation. He fancied he had just returned from one of those long drives that he used to take, seated between the doctor and his little friend, that he would find his mother and the keeper's wife laying the table, while HE sat at work, upstairs in the turret. What added the finishing touch to his illusion was d'Argenton's bust, which had not been removed to Paris, as it would take up too much room; it was still enthroned upon the lawn, rusty and gloomy-looking, throwing its shifting shadow around it like the needle of a sun-dial.

He passed the evening by the fireplace, before a fire of twigs, for life in the stoking-room had made him sensitive to cold. And as in former days, when he returned from some delightful expedition in the open country, and the memories he brought back prevented him from feeling the depressing sadness and tyranny that oppressed the entire household, so, upon this evening, Cécile's name, often repeated, filled his heart with a warmth and sense of well-being he had not known for many a day, peopled his solitude with beloved phantoms and joyous visions that accompanied him even in his slumber.

The next day, at noon, he rang at the doctor's door.

As the worthy man had said, nothing was changed in the house; it was no nearer completion than ever, and the veranda, still waiting its glass frame, was a little rustier, that was all.

Cécile and Jack



"Monsieur has not returned. Mademoiselle is in the pharmacy," said the little maid-servant who had replaced the old and faithful domestic of other days. A puppy barked from his kennel instead of the old Newfoundland, proving in this way that inanimate things last longer than beings, whatever the species to which they belong.

Jack went up into the surgery, — that great room where he had formerly played so often. He knocked eagerly, impatient to find his friend again; he thought of her still only as a child, and the doctor's affectionate "little one" brought to his mind the image of a girl of seven.

"Come in, Monsieur Jack."

Instead of entering, Jack began to tremble, startled and strangely moved.

"Come in," the voice repeated; it was the voice he used to know — Cécile's voice — but fuller, richer, more sonorous, sweeter, and deeper.

The door opened suddenly, and Jack, bathed in that sudden light, asked himself whether that aureole did not proceed from the youthful and lovely apparition standing on the threshold, from her light gown, with its blue cashmere waist, from the bright golden hair above the pale forehead stamped with nobility and gentleness. How intimidated he would have been if that lovely creature had not reassured him with a glance of her delicate, discreet, gray eyes, such frank, clear eyes that said, "Good-morning, Jack. It is I, it is Cécile. Do not be afraid!" while a little hand was placed in his, recalling to him the loving

warmth that had penetrated his very heart that famous *fête*-day of the fifteenth of August.

"Life has been very hard for you, Monsieur Jack, my grandfather has told me." She spoke with deep feeling. "I, too, have had much sorrow. Grandmamma is dead. She was so fond of you! We often talked about you."

Who but Cécile could speak to him thus? He seated himself in front of her, his eyes fixed upon her. She was tall, grace and simplicity itself in every movement. At that moment she leaned upon the old desk where Madame Rivals used to write, her head bent slightly forward to talk to her friend with the movement of a swallow chirping upon the edge of a roof.

Jack remembered that he had seen his mother look very lovely at times, and had admired her with all his heart. But about Cécile there clung, emanated from her, that indefinable subtle something — a perfume, an aroma of the divine springtime of life, so wholesome, revivifying and pure, that it made all Charlottte's little graces, her joyous laugh, her magnificent gestures seem discordant and jarring.

Suddenly, while he remained there spellbound before her, his glance fell upon one of his own hands, spread out upon his blouse with that awkwardness that marks the laborer's limbs when at rest. His hand seemed enormous to himself, indelibly blackened, hacked with cuts and scratches, hardened and burned by contact with iron and fire, and his broken finger-nails did not

improve its appearance. He was ashamed of it, and did not know where to hide it. At last he got rid of it by shoving it into his pocket.

But all was over for him now. Suddenly he realized how ugly his person was. He saw himself seated upon a chair, sunken in it, with his legs spread out, and ridiculously dressed in a working man's trousers and an old velvet jacket of d'Argenton's, too short in the sleeves. It was ever his fate to wear clothes too short for him.

What could she think of him? How kind, how indulgent she must be not to laugh at him! for she knew how to laugh in spite of her serious air, and innumerable, roguish little smiles quivered the mobile nostrils of her straight little nose and played about the corners of her firm, rosy, and delicately-curved lips.

To his physical embarrassment was added another of a moral nature. To make his confusion and discomfort complete, all the debauchery, all the orgies of his sailor life returned to his memory, as if all the low dens in which he had wallowed had left their hideous and visible stain upon him. The line of sorrow that marked her peaceful young brow, the look of compassion in those beautiful eyes — all told him that she perceived his degradation, and he suffered, and was ashamed. Blessed suffering and shame! It was the awakening of his soul, confused and bathed in tears. But he was not conscious of this. He was vexed at himself for having come, and longed to run away, to rush down the stairs, four at a

time, never stopping till he should reach Les Aulnettes, to lock himself in securely as possible, and to throw the key down the well, that he might never again be tempted to go out.

Fortunately, there came visitors to the pharmacy, and Cécile busied herself with the copper scales, weighed, numbered packages, copied prescriptions, as her grandmother used to do, and Jack no longer felt all the weight of the young girl's glance fixed upon his miserable self.

And he was free to admire her to his heart's content.

Indeed she was worthy of admiration, gentleness and patience itself to those poor peasant women, stupid and garrulous, insisting upon lengthy explanations that had neither beginning nor end.

She had a smile, a word of encouragement or good counsel for each, and a quiet way of putting herself upon the level of those who were speaking to her, bending all the grace of her mind towards them. At the moment she was busied with a former acquaintance of Jack's, the old poacher, Mother Salé, who had caused him many a fright when a child. Bent, like all the peasant-women, whom the earth seems to draw towards her bosom in their daily toil, wrinkled by the sun, dried-up and dust-stained, old Salé would have looked quite lifeless, but for the gleam of her suspicious eyes, blackened and sunken in their lids like evil beasts' peering out from a lair. She was talking of her "man," her poor man, who had been sick

now for many a month; he could earn nothing, and yet he could not make up his mind to die. She seemed to take pleasure in speaking as brutally as possible, in a language all her own, looking into the young girl's face as if highly amused with trying to stare her out of countenance. Two or three times Jack felt a furious desire to take this hardened, tattered old hag and show her the door. But he restrained himself when he saw Cécile remain so impassive in spite of that aggressive coarseness, retaining a composure and calm against which the sharp edge of wickedness itself was disarmed.

When the prescription had been put up the peasant-woman withdrew with profuse curtsies, and false-tongued servile benedictions. As she passed Jack, she turned and recognized him.

"Oh, the little fellow of Les Aulnettes," she said aloud to Cécile, who accompanied her to the door. "Good Lord! what a sight he is! Say, Mamselle Cécile, this will stop the tongues of those who used to say long ago that Monsieur Rivals was cooking up the little Ragenton as a husband for you. Sure, you'll have nothing to say to him now. It's a confounded shame to see what life does to people."

And she went out snickering. Jack felt himself growing pale. Ah, the old gypsy, how well she had aimed that blow of the sickle with which she had threatened him so often! A real sickle-thrust with a curved blade, wicked and twisted as its name. The cut went deep, deep, and

would take long to heal. But Jack was not the only one who had been wounded, and I know some one who kept up an appearance of writing in the big book, and wrote crookedly, her head bowed, deep emotion crimsoning her face.

"Quick, Catherine, bring in the soup, and some good wine, some good brandy, and the rest."

The doctor was speaking; he had just returned, and observing that Jack and Cécile, seated opposite each other, maintained an embarrassed silence, he greeted them with a burst of joyous laughter.

"Well, now! you have not seen each other for seven years, and this is all you have to say to one another? Come, to the table, quick! and then this poor boy will feel more at his ease."

But luncheon did not set Jack at his ease; on the contrary, it redoubled his embarrassment. In Cécile's presence he did not know how to eat, and trembled lest he should betray the habits of the public-house. At d'Argenton's table, the bad manners he had acquired during his working man's days did not trouble him; but here he felt out of place, ridiculous, and his unfortunate hands were a source of actual torture to him. The one which held his fork acquitted itself well enough, for it was occupied, but what ought he to do with the other? All its cracks and scars stood out frightfully against the white tablecloth. In despair, he let it hang at his side, which gave him the appearance of having but one arm. Cécile's thoughtful attentions merely increased his timidity; she perceived this, and for the rest of the

repast, which seemed of interminable length, cast only a furtive glance now and then in his direction.

At last Catherine came to clear away the dessert, and placed before the young girl hot water, sugar, and a long-necked bottle of very old brandy. Now that her grandmother was with them no longer, Cécile mixed the doctor's grog, and the worthy man had gained little by the change, for, constantly fearing lest she should make it too stiff, she had weakened it so much that now it was scarcely more than a pharmaceutical lotion, "in which the dose of alcohol diminished day by day," as Monsieur Rivals remarked plaintively.

When she had passed her grandfather his glass, the young girl turned towards their guest:

"Do you drink brandy, Monsieur Jack?"

The doctor laughed.

"Ask a stoker whether he drinks brandy! This little girl amazes me! Don't you know that is what they live upon, poor devils? Why! aboard the 'Bayonnaise,' I remember one who used to break open the spirit levels and drink the contents. You may make his grog stiff; you will never get it too strong for him."

She looked at Jack, a gentle but sad expression upon her face.

"Will you have some?"

"No, thank you, mademoiselle," he said in a low voice, half ashamed; and it did indeed require a slight effort for him to withdraw his glass, but

he was more than repaid by one of those grateful glances full of mute eloquence that some women know so well how to bestow — a look that is understood only by the one to whom it is addressed.

"Why, there's a conversion for you!" exclaimed the good doctor, gulping down his grog with a comical grimace. For his own part, he was but half-converted, after the fashion of certain savages, who consent to believe in God merely to please the missionary.

The Étiolles peasants, at work in the fields, when they saw Jack returning from the Rivals that afternoon, striding along the road, must have thought that he had gone mad, or else that too hearty a repast at the doctor's had gone to his brain. He was gesticulating, talking to himself, shaking his fist at the horizon and the prey to an excitement and rage so strangely out of keeping with his usual torpor that no one would have believed him capable of them.

"A working man!" he said, with a quiver of his whole body, "a working man! I am that for life. Monsieur d'Argenton is right. I must remain with my equals, live with them, and die among them, and of all things I must never strive to raise myself. It is too hard."

It was a long while since he had felt so nervous, so full of animation. A world of new and strange sensations dawned within him, and beneath each one, like a star reflected brokenly by the thousand facets of the changing waters, gleamed Cécile's

image. What a splendor of grace and beauty and purity! And to think that instead of making a common laborer of him, compelling him to cast his lot with the lowest, they might have reared and educated him so that he could have become a man worthy of this young girl, might have won her as wife, possessed this treasure all to himself. Oh, God! He uttered a cry of despairing rage, with the agony of one who is shipwrecked and battling vainly with the waves, while close at hand he sights the shore bathed in sunlight, where nets are spread to dry.

At that moment, as Jack turned up the road leading to Les Aulnettes, he found himself face to face with Mother Salé, loaded with a bundle of fagots. The old creature looked at him with the same evil smile he had seen in the morning when she said, "Sure, you will not have anything to do with him now." Jack started at that smile and all the fury that seethed within him, and did not know upon whom to descend, — since in following its natural impulse it must have hurt one who was very dear to him — the weak, frivolous creature, who alone was responsible for his misfortune — all his frenzy turned against this horrible old crone.

"Ah, viper!" he thought; "I will pluck out your fangs!"

His face was so terrible that old Mother Salé took fright as she saw him coming towards her, dropped her fagots, and sprang towards the woods with the swiftness of an old goat. It was retri-

bution for the days when she had pursued him, and he followed her now for some distance, but suddenly he stopped.

"I am mad. The woman, after all, said nothing but the truth. Cécile would not have anything to do with me now."

That evening he did not dine, lighted neither fire nor light. Seated in a corner of the dining-room, the only room he inhabited, and in which he had brought together the few bits of furniture scattered about the house, his eyes fixed upon the glass door through which the light fog of a fine autumn night grew white in the invisible light of the rising moon, he thought to himself:

"Cécile would not have me now." This one thought absorbed him the whole evening.

Of course she could care nothing about him now. In fact, everything separated them. In the first place, he was merely a workman, and worse still — the horrible word rose to his lips — "a bastard." It was the first time in his life that the thought had occurred to him. To a child such a stigma is almost a matter of indifference, unless his surroundings emphasize it in too outrageous a fashion, — and Jack had lived in a world that was not too much troubled with scruples, passing from the society of the Failures to life among that working class where poverty is an excuse for every sin, and where adopted families are far more numerous than elsewhere. As mention had never been made of his father, he had never thought much about him, and scarcely had

felt the want of his affection, — just as a deaf mute understands that he lacks certain senses without realizing fully their use, or the pleasures they would procure for him.

But now this question of his birth was of the utmost concern to him. When Charlotte had told him the name of his father, he had remained perfectly calm at that startling revelation; but now he longed to question her, to wrest the details from her, to obtain a confession, even, that he might form a more exact conception of his unknown father. Marquis de l'Épan? Was he really a marquis? Was not that some new flight of the imagination of that poor little brain dazed with titles and aristocracy? Was it true even that his father was dead? Had not his mother said this merely to avoid telling him the story of some liaison suddenly broken, some tale of abandonment at which she must have blushed before him? And if this father of his were still alive, would he be generous enough to repair his fault, and give his name to his son? "Jack, Marquis de l'Épan!"

He repeated this phrase to himself as if the title brought him nearer to Cécile. The poor boy was quite ignorant of the fact that all the vanities of the world are of trivial value in touching the true heart of a woman, compared to that pity which opens the heart to all tenderness.

"I will write to my mother," he thought. But the questions he wished to ask her were of so delicate and complicated a nature, so difficult to

write, that he decided to go and see Charlotte, and to have with her one of those conversations in which the eye aids the tongue, and in which silence often implies a confession more eloquently than words. Unfortunately he had not money enough to go by rail. His mother was to have sent him some, but probably she had never thought of it a second time.

"Pshaw!" he said to himself, "I walked that distance when I was eleven. I can do it again, although I am rather weak now."

And he did travel again that terrible road; and if it appeared shorter, less formidable to him, he found it far sadder. This is not an uncommon impression when childish memories are viewed again at an age when judgment and reason breed disenchantment. It would seem that a child's eyes color all things with a coloring of their own, which lasts as long as the ignorance of that first outlook upon life, but as he grows older, all that seemed so wonderful to him looks tarnished and faded. Poets are men whose eyes have kept their childhood's vision.

Jack saw the place where he had slept, the little gate at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, where he had stopped, to make the kindly cap with ear-laps believe that his mother lived there, the heap of stones beside the ditch where the outstretched body of a man had frightened him so, the low pot-house, the hideous, cut-throat hole that had been recalled so often in his dreams. Alas! he had seen many a one like it since then. The sinister

faces of drunken workmen, of vagrants of the slums prowling about them, the sights that had terrified him long ago, did not even surprise him now, and as he elbowed past them, he thought to himself that if the Jack his childhood remembered were to confront him suddenly upon the dusty high-road, if the child with the hesitating, hurried step of a runaway schoolboy were to stand face to face with the Jack of to-day, very likely his former self would shrink more from that sight than from any other gloomy apparition he had seen.

It was nearly one in the afternoon when he reached Paris, and a cold, searching rain was falling; still dwelling upon the comparison he had been making between his past and his present, he recalled that glorious dawn, the sudden splendid rift in the May sky, in which his mother had appeared to him at the end of his first journey like the archangel Raphael, enveloped in glory, and scattering with his light the gloomy cohorts of the night. Instead of the tiny villa of Les Aulnettes, where his Ida sang among the flowers, d'Argenton appeared to him, emerging from the cold and cavernous porch of the *Review of the Races of the Future;* he was followed by Moronval, loaded with proofs, and a crowd of Failures were firing off in rapid succession the parting shots of a recent discussion.

"Why! there's Jack!" said the mulatto.

The poet trembled and raised his head.

At sight of the two men, the one so well-gloved, sleek and carefully arrayed, the other

emaciated, clad in an old velvet jacket that was too short for him, and shiny with wear and rain, no one would have suspected that they were related to each other in any way. And it is such incongruities as these that give to irregular households of this sort their peculiar physiognomy, some such blemish that reveals the purely accidental nature of the relationship in a family where the father, perhaps, is a carpenter, the daughter a countess, and the brother a suburban hairdresser.

Jack held out his hand to d'Argenton who carelessly extended a finger, and asked him if the house at Les Aulnettes was let.

"What? Let?" asked the other, who did not understand.

"Why, yes. Seeing you here, what other idea could occur to me, except that the house must be occupied, and you are obliged to return."

"No," replied Jack, much disconcerted, "no one has even come to look at it since I have been there."

"Then what brings you here?"

"I have come to see my mother."

"That is a whim I can understand. Unfortunately, travelling is expensive."

"But I came afoot," said Jack, very simply, with an air of assurance and quiet dignity that must have surprised the other.

"Ah!" observed d'Argenton, pondered a second, and then fired this little shot:

"Well, I am glad to learn that your legs are in better shape for work than your arms."

"That cut struck home!" chuckled the mulatto.

The poet smiled modestly, and, satisfied with the effect he had produced, he disappeared, followed along the quays by his obsequious escort, in single file.

A week ago d'Argenton's cruel words would have passed over Jack's head, so brutalized was his condition, but since yesterday he was changed. A few hours had been enough to render him proud and sensitive to such a degree that after the insult he had just received he was sorely tempted to return at once on foot as he had come, without even a glimpse of his mother, but he wanted to speak with her, to talk seriously, and he went upstairs.

The apartment was turned topsy-turvy. Jack found upholsterers there, busily engaged in hanging curtains and arranging benches as if there were to be a public distribution of prizes, for that very day was to witness a great literary fête to which all the offscourings of literature and art were summoned, and this was the cause of d'Argenton's rage at the arrival of Charlotte's son. She herself appeared no better pleased. When she caught sight of him, she was bustling about, busily engaged as mistress of the house in transforming it, creating tiny salons, boudoirs and smoking-rooms everywhere, out of alcoves and dressing-rooms.

"Why! is that you, my poor Jack! I will wager you have come for some money. You must have thought I had forgotten all about you.

The fact is, I intended to send it by Monsieur Hirsch, who is going to Les Aulnettes to make some curious experiments in perfumes, a new medicine he has learned about in a Persian book — you will see what a wonderful discovery he has made!"

They stood talking in a low voice, in the midst of workmen passing back and forth, hammering nails and moving furniture.

"I would like to speak with you seriously," said Jack.

"Oh, good Heavens, what about? What is the matter now? You know that seriousness was never my strong point. And besides, as you can see yourself, everything is upset to-day on account of the great soirée we are to give. It will be simply magnificent. We have issued five hundred invitations. I will not ask you to remain, because — well, you understand! Besides, it would not amuse you. Come, if you really insist upon talking with me, let us go out upon the terrace. I have arranged a veranda for the smokers. You shall see yourself how comfortable it is!"

She led him to a veranda roofed with zinc, and lined with striped tent-cloth, ornamented with a divan, a jardinière and a hanging-lamp. Nevertheless its appearance was rather depressing by daylight, with the rain beating noisily down upon it, and the wet, foggy horizon bordering the banks of the Seine.

Jack felt uneasy. He thought to himself:

"It would have been better if I had written," and he did not know where to begin.

"Well?" said Charlotte, and paused, chin in hand, assuming the pretty pose of a woman listening.

He still hesitated a moment, as one might hesitate in placing a heavy weight upon a whatnot meant only for knick-knacks, for what he had to say would tax considerably the little head that leaned towards him.

"I would like—I would like to speak with you about my father."

"Why, what an idea!" trembled upon her lips, and though she did not utter the words, the startled expression of her face, upon which stupefaction, ennui, and fear were written, spoke for her:

"This is a very sad subject for us both, my poor child, but, painful as it is, I can understand your curiosity, and am ready to satisfy it. Besides," she added very solemnly, "I had always intended, when you should reach twenty to reveal to you the secret of your birth."

This time it was his turn to gaze at her in utter astonishment.

Then she had quite forgotten that she had made him this revelation three months ago. But he did not protest against her forgetfulness, for it afforded him opportunity to compare what she was about to say with what she had already told him. He knew her so well!

"Is it true that my father was of noble birth?" he asked.

"Of the noblest birth, my child."

"A marquis?"

"No, only a baron."

"But—I thought—you told me—"

"No, no, the marquisate belonged to the elder branch of the Bulacs."

"Then he was allied to these Bulacs."

"I think so. He was the head of the younger branch."

"And my father's name was—?"

"Baron de Bulac, lieutenant in the navy."

If the balcony had given way, carrying in its fall the veranda lined with tent-cloth, and all it contained, Jack could not have received a more frightful shock. But he had still courage enough left to ask:

"Is it long since he died?"

"Oh, yes, very long," answered Charlotte, making an eloquent gesture as if to consign to a very remote past a portion of her existence that had become very problematical even for herself.

His father was dead; this was probably the truth. But was he a de Bulac or a de l'Épan? Was his mother lying to him this time, or on that other occasion? And, after all, perhaps she had not lied, perhaps even she herself did not really know.

Oh the shame of it!

"How ill you look, my Jack," said Charlotte, suddenly interrupting herself in the middle of a long and romantic story upon which she had launched at full speed, in pursuit of her lieuten-

ant of the navy, "Why! your hands are cold as ice. I was wrong to bring you out upon the balcony."

"It is nothing," said Jack; "it will pass away in walking."

"What! you are going so soon? But you are right. It is better that you should return in good season. The weather is so bad. Come, kiss me." And she kissed him quite tenderly, pulled up the collar of his coat, and gave him a plaid of her own to protect him from the cold, and slipped a little money into his pocket. She fancied that the sadness that clouded his features was caused by the sight of those preparations for a fête at which he was not to be present, consequently, she hastened his departure, and when her maid came to say, "Madame, the hairdresser is here," she took this opportunity to hastily bid him farewell.

"You see, I must leave you. Take good care of yourself. Write oftener."

He slowly descended the stairs, supporting himself by the railing.

Ah, no! it was not the thought of the party they were to give that evening that weighed so heavily upon his heart, but the thought of all those other glad festivals to which none had ever bidden him, the festivals of children who have a father and mother to love and respect, the festival of all those who have a name, a hearth, a family they may call their own. He knew too that there was another festival from which fate would exclude him pitilessly, that festival of blissful love

which unites one forever with another who is beauty and loyalty and truth itself. He would never sit at that feast. And the unfortunate was disconsolate, without realizing that in regretting these joys he was already, in some sort, worthy of them, and that there was a great gap between that former torpor of his, and this clear insight into his sorrowful destiny that alone could give him strength to struggle against it.

Beset by gloomy thoughts, he approached the Lyons station, passing through those wretched parts of the city where the mud seems thicker, the fog heavier, because the houses are so black, the gutters overflowing, and because the weight of human misery aids and increases this gloomy aspect of nature itself. It was the hour when the factories stop work. A weary, wan population, a human flood bearing onward its own discouragement and misery, overran the pavements and the road, hurrying towards liquor-shops, towards wretched pot-houses, some of which bore the sign *a la Consolation*, as though drunkenness and oblivion were the only refuge of those unhappy creatures. Jack, exhausted and chilled, finding his life's horizon closing around him, shut in as fast as the earth itself, upon that cold, rainy, autumnal evening, made a sudden gesture, uttered a cry of despair:

"They are right, by God. That is all there is — drink!"

And crossing one of those thresholds sullied by the vile slumber or the murderous brawls of drun-

kenness, the former stoker ordered a double quantity of *vitriol*.[1] But just as he was about to raise the glass to his lips, in the midst of the disturbance and uproar created by that crowd, amid pipe-smoke and the thick mist rising from all these breaths reeking with liquor, and blouses soaked with rain — suddenly a celestial smile seemed to greet him, and a low, sweet voice murmured in his ear:

"Do you drink brandy, Monsieur Jack?"

No, indeed, he did not drink it, and he never will again. He left the tavern hastily, setting down his glass untouched at the bar, where his money, thrown down sharply, rang in the ears of the astonished crowd.

[1] The popular name given to brandy in Paris. Wine is called *vichenet.*

II.

CONVALESCENCE.

How Jack fell very ill after this sad journey, and was for a fortnight a prisoner at Les Aulnettes, abandoned to the ministrations of Doctor Hirsch, who experimented upon this new Mâdou with his system of medication by perfume, how Monsieur Rivals came to his rescue and bore him away, actually by force, and restored him to life and health, — all this would take a long time to tell; we will pass over that, to meet our friend Jack again, installed in a comfortable arm-chair before one of the windows of the pharmacy, books close at his hand, and around him an all-pervading, refreshing repose that broods about the tranquil horizon, the silent house, and is not broken when Cécile's light footstep is heard, bringing to his indolence just the amount of activity necessary to make this convalescent enjoy to the utmost these long days of absolute idleness.

He is so happy that he does not even speak, is content to sit with half-open eyes, directed towards that dear presence, listening to Cécile's needle, the sound of her pen upon the ruled paper of her account-books.

"Oh, that grandfather of mine! I am sure he hides from me half the visits he makes. Only

yesterday he contradicted himself twice. He persisted in telling me he had not visited the Goudeloups, and a moment later he told me the wife was a little better! You noticed that, did n't you, Jack?"

"Mademoiselle?" he said, with a sudden start. He had heard not a word, was absorbed in looking at her; she was simplicity always, and like no one but herself, graceful, yet without the childish and wilful capriciousness of young girls who realize that madcap ways have a certain charm, and spoil it all by affectation. In her everything was deep and serious. Her voice rang from regions of thought. Her glance absorbed and retained light. You felt that everything which penetrated this soul, all that went out from it, had sunk deep, and was far-reaching. And mere words, that worn, obliterated currency of thought, when spoken by her, seemed to receive a fresh imprint just as they sometimes grow to new meaning when married to music, and enveloped in some magic accord of Handel or Palestrina. When Cécile said "My friend Jack," it seemed to him that no one had ever called him so before. And when she said "Good-by," his heart was as heavy as though he would never see her again, so definite the meaning assumed by everything in this reflective and serene nature. In that singular state of the convalescent, when weakness is so sensitive to every physical or moral influence, and shivers at the slightest draught, and is warmed by the least sunbeam, Jack was vividly impressed with all this charm.

Oh! those glad, delightful days passed in that blessed house; how everything about him seemed specially devised to hasten his recovery! The pharmacy, a great room almost destitute of furniture, with its high wooden cupboards painted white, its white muslin curtains, faced south, looking upon the end of the village street and upon a horizon of harvest fields, communicating to his senses health and calm, invigorating odors of dried herbs, plants gathered in all the splendor of their flowering. Here nature seemed to place herself within the invalid's reach, her moods softened, gentle, and benevolent, and he drank in new life, intoxicated, and old memories revived. He could seem to hear the murmur of brooklets in the scent of the balsams, he saw a vista of green and leafy forest-arches as he inhaled the perfume of the centaureas gathered at the foot of the great oaks. By degrees, as strength returned to him, Jack tried to read. He turned over the old books of the library, and among them discovered many that he had studied before, and took up again, better able to understand them. Cécile went about her daily work as usual, and as the doctor was always out, the two young people were left to themselves, under the care of the little servant. This was food for some gossip, and the constant presence of this big fellow at the side of this beautiful young girl shocked some prudent mothers not a little. Certainly, had Madame Rivals been alive, things would have been very different, but the doctor himself was scarcely more than a child in the

presence of these two children. And then, who knows? the worthy doctor may have had an idea of his own.

In the meantime, d'Argenton, informed that Jack was installed at the Rivals', regarded this state of affairs as a personal insult to himself. "It is not proper that you should be there," wrote Charlotte. "What will people think of us in the neighborhood? It will be said that we were unable to care for you. It looks like a public reproach addressed to us." As this first letter produced no effect, the poet himself — HIMSELF — wrote Jack: "I sent Hirsch to look after you, but you have preferred the idiotic routine of that country-doctor to all the science of our friend. Heaven grant you may be the gainer by it. At all events, since you are on your feet again, I give you two days to return to Les Aulnettes; if in two days you have not returned, I shall consider that you are in open rebellion against my authority, and from that moment all is over between us. A word to the wise is sufficient!"

As Jack showed no sign of moving, Charlotte herself appeared upon the scene; she came with an air of great dignity, her satchel full of chocolate to nibble upon the road, and a store of phrases learned by heart for the occasion, prompted by her "artist." Monsieur Rivals received her on the lower floor, and not in the least intimidated by the apparent reserve of the lady, nor the slight compression of her expansive mouth, and the effort

she made to restrain her exuberant tongue, the doctor burst forth:

"I must tell you, madame, that it was I who prevented Jack from returning to Les Aulnettes. His life was at stake, yes, madame, his life. Your son is passing through a terrible crisis of fatigue, exhaustion, and growth. Happily, he is at an age when constitutions may still be mended, and I hope that his will resist this severe attack, granted, of course that you do not intrust his care to that miserable Hirsch of yours, that assassin who was asphyxiating him with incense, musk, and benzoin, under the pretext of curing him. You know nothing of all that, I suppose. I brought him away from Les Aulnettes where he was surrounded by clouds of smoke, aspirators, inhalers, and incense-burners. I gave all that stuff a kick that sent it flying, and the doctor with it, I am afraid. At present the boy is out of danger. Leave him to me for a while, and I promise to send him back to you stronger than before, and able to return to his hard life; but if you give him over to that dreadful druggist I shall think that your son is an encumbrance to you, and that you want to get him out of the way."

"Oh, Monsieur Rivals! how can you say that to me? My God! my God! what have I done to deserve such an insult?"

This last question naturally occasioned a torrent of tears, which the doctor promptly dried with a few kindly words, and reassured, Charlotte went upstairs to see her Jack, who was alone in the

pharmacy, reading. She found him improved,—and greatly changed, as though he had cast off some grosser covering—but languid and weakened by this process of transformation. She was really touched. He grew pale upon seeing her enter.

"Have you come for me?"

"Oh no, no! You are too comfortable where you are, and the good doctor is so fond of you. What would he say if I took you away?"

For the first time in his life Jack thought that one might be happy away from his mother, and had he been obliged to leave his latest refuge, grief would certainly have brought about a relapse. For a short time they were alone together, talking. Charlotte permitted herself to grow slightly confidential. She wore a discontented air:

"You see, my child, this literary life is really too exciting for me. We have a great fête every month now. Every fortnight there is a reading. It is a great care for me. My poor head was never very strong, and I wonder how it stands so much. Monsieur Moronval's Japanese prince has written a great poem, in his own language, of course. And now HE has set his mind upon translating it verse by verse! He is taking lessons in Japanese, and so am I, just imagine! It is dreadfully difficult. No, I really begin to believe that literature is not my *forte*. There are days when I scarcely know what I am doing or saying. And that *Review* does not bring us in a sou, not so much as a single subscriber. By the by, you

know — *Bon ami* — Well, he is dead. I was very sorry to hear it. You remember him?"

At that moment Cécile entered.

"Ah, Mademoiselle Cécile, how you have grown! And how pretty you are!"

She extended her arms, shaking out all the laces of her mantle to embrace the young girl. But Jack felt very uneasy. Not for worlds would he have spoken of d'Argenton or *Bon ami* in Cécile's hearing, and several times he diverted the idle babble of his mother, who had no such scruples. While he had a feeling of deep tenderness for her, each of these loves of his life had its own rightful place; the one he protected, the other protected him, and as much of respect entered into his first impulse of love as there was of pity in his filial tenderness. They tried to detain Madame d'Argenton for dinner, but she felt she had remained too long already, altogether too long for the ferocious egotism of her poet, and until the very moment of leaving, she was restless and preoccupied; she was inventing in advance the little story she would relate on her return, to make her excuses.

"Above all things, my Jack, if you have anything to write me, be sure to send your letter to Paris, *poste restante*, for you understand that he is very much displeased with you at present, and of course, I must also appear to be vexed. Do not be surprised if you receive a lecture from me. He is always standing over my shoulder when I write you. Often he even dictates what I shall say. Let me see — I tell you what, I will put a cross at

the end of the letter, and that will mean 'This does not count!'"

In this naïve fashion she confessed her servitude, and Jack's only consolation for the tyranny that oppressed his mother was to see the poor, giddy creature go off, looking so young, so gay, her gown so well draped, and her travelling bag carried upon her arm so cheerfully, so lightly. So she would have borne any burden life had chanced to bestow upon her.

Have you ever noticed those water-plants whose long stems spring from the bottom of the river, lengthen as they climb upwards, overcoming every obstacle of aquatic vegetation, to burst at last on the surface into magnificent corollas, rounded as cups, balmy with that rich sweet scent to which the bitterness and verdure of the water lend a slight wildness? So love grew in the hearts of these two children. That love was deep-rooted, it had sprung from the tender soil of childhood, where every seed sown germinates, bearing the promise of flowering. With Cécile these divine flowers had shot straight upwards in a limpid soul wherein clear-sighted eyes might easily have discovered them. With Jack, their growth had been checked in slime and mire; inextricable plants had wound about them, fettering their growth. But at last they had reached the regions of air and light, and now they stood erect, sprang forth, and almost opened on the surface their flower-faces. The least stir of the waters passed over them lightly, with a shiver; they

needed but a little, a very little, to make them unfold. An hour's work merely of love and sunshine would be enough.

"If you would like," said Monsieur Rivals one day to the two children, "we can all go together to-morrow to the vintage at Coudray. The farmer has offered to send a cart for us; you shall go together in the morning, and I will join you in time for dinner."

They accepted the proposition joyfully, and set out one fine morning towards the end of October, in a light mist which seemed to lift at every turn of the wheels, rising like a veil of gauze, and disclosing a charming landscape. On the harvest-fields, on the golden sheaves, on slender plants, last effort of the season, floated long white silken threads clinging and trailing like bits of rising fog. It left a cloth of spun silver all along the flat stretches of country upon which autumn stamps such grandeur and solemnity. Below the main-road ran the river, bordered by ancient homesteads and enormous clumps of trees reddened by the summer that had just gone. The freshness that overspread everything, the softness of the air, added to the gay humor of the travellers, shaken about upon the rough seats, their feet in the straw. and both hands clinging to the sides of the cart. One of the farmer's daughters drove a little obstinate gray donkey, which shook its long ears, tormented by wasps, very numerous at that season of the year when the harvest of fruit filled the air with such delicious perfumes.

They trotted on and on. Étiolles and Soisy were passed on each side of the road with those sudden and unexpected glimpses of country that make the delight of travelling. The bridge of Corbeil was crossed and some distance further on, following the river's brink, they found themselves among the vintagers.

On the slopes descending to the Seine, a swarm of workers had alighted, plucking, and despoiling the branches of their leaves, with that sound like the dropping of hail made by silkworms among the mulberry-branches. Jack and Cécile seized an osier-basket, and hastened to work. Oh! what a lovely spot it was, with glimpses of rustic landscape seen through the vines, and the narrow winding picturesque river covered with evergreen islands, like the Rhine near Basle, in miniature; not far away, a dam with its sound of falling waters, its whirlpools of foam, and over all the sun itself, rising in a golden mist, at its side a slender white crescent, announcing to this glorious day that the season of lengthening nights had come, and fires must be kindled betimes.

And indeed this fair day itself was very short, at least Jack found it so. He did not leave Cécile for a moment, kept constantly in sight her narrow-brimmed straw hat, her flowered cambric skirt, and her basket which he filled with the finest bunches of grapes, carefully gathered and covered with the fresh bloom, delicate as the down of a butterfly's wing, which gives the berry the translucency of stained glass. Together they looked at this

bloom upon the fruit, and when Jack raised his eyes, he admired upon his sweetheart's cheeks, upon her temple, and about her lips a bloom as soft and downy and fragile, the velvety freshness of feature like that which dawn and youth and solitude leave upon grapes that have never been plucked, upon hearts that have not yet loved. The young girl's soft hair, lifted lightly by each breath of air, added to this aerial appearance. Never before had he seen her face so radiant. Exercise and the excitement of her delightful labor, the gayety communicated throughout the vineyard by the calls and songs and laughter of the vintagers, had transformed the doctor's quiet housekeeper; she had become again the child she was at heart, and she ran along the slopes, bearing her basket upon her shoulder, her arm upraised, her pure face intent upon balancing her burden with the rhythmic step which recalled to Jack that of the Breton women, carrying their jugs of water upon their heads, and attempting to reconcile speed with the firm cautious carriage necessary in supporting the burden they bore.

But there came a moment in the day when fatigue compelled the two children to seat themselves by the edge of a little wood bright with pink heather, and carpeted with crisp dry leaves.

And then?

No, even at that moment they had no words for each other. Their love was not of the sort that is quickly avowed or formulated. They watched night grow in the sky, descending upon the fairest

dream they had ever dreamed in their lives, an elusive, intoxicating dream full of the perfume of nature, a dream to which the swiftly falling twilight of autumn suddenly lent a charming touch of domesticity as it lighted up here and there upon the horizon some window, some invisible threshold that stirred thoughts of the footsteps turning homeward to the hearth where loved ones were waiting. As the air grew keener, Cécile insisted upon wrapping about Jack's neck a woollen scarf she had brought. The softness of its texture, its warmth, that fragrance clinging to carefully kept apparel, were like a caress, and made the lover grow pale.

"What ails you, Jack? are you in pain?"

"Oh no, Cécile, I have never before been so well."

She had taken his hand, but when she wished to withdraw her own, he in turn would not let it go, and thus they remained for a moment, silent, with fingers interlaced.

That was all.

When they returned to the farm, the doctor had just arrived. They could hear his kindly, hearty voice below in the courtyard, and the rumbling of the carriage as it was unharnessed. Those fresh autumn evenings have a poetry of their own, and Jack and Cécile enjoyed it to the utmost as they entered the low room where the fire for supper was blazing. The coarse white cloth, the flowered plates, the savory smell of a peasant-repast, all contributed to the rusticity of the feast,

ending at dessert by a tumbling of grapes upon the table, much going back and forth between dining-room and cellar, with a very general tasting of old vintages and new. Jack, quite absorbed in Cécile, who was his neighbor at table, felt a profound disdain for the dusty bottles brought from the cellar. Not so the doctor, who relished keenly this excellent custom of vintage fêtes; in fact he relished it so much that his little granddaughter rose noiselessly, had the horse harnessed, wrapped her cloak about her, and good old Rivals, finding that she was ready to go, left the table, got into the gig, and took the reins, leaving his glass half full upon the table, a fact which scandalized the guests.

The three returned together through the solitude of the country roads, as they had done so often in the old days, but a little more crowded in the gig than of old, for it had not grown bigger though they had, and its old worn-out springs rattled, as it travelled over the road. This sound did not in the least take away from the charm of the drive which the stars, so thickly sprinkled through the autumn sky, followed from on high, looking like a shower of golden raindrops suspended in the keen air overhead. They passed along park-walls, overflowing with branches that brushed against them, and frequently ending at some mysterious little pavilion, all its blinds closed as if it hid the past within its shade. On the other side was the Seine, with only the lock-keeper's houses to be seen, long rafts loaded with

wood, and barges with fires burning at bow and stern, silently reflected in the river.

"You are not cold, Jack?" asked the doctor. How could he be cold? The fringes of Cécile's big shawl touched him, and besides, his thoughts were full of sunshine.

Alas! that there must come a to-morrow after such perfect days! Why must life itself dispel our dreams so rudely? Jack knew now that he loved Cécile, but he felt that his love destined both only to suffering. She was too far above him, and although he had changed much, living at her side, and cast off somewhat of the rough shell, he felt himself unworthy of the lovely enchantress who had transformed him. The mere thought that the young girl might discover his passion embarrassed him in her presence. Moreover, as health returned to him, he began to feel ashamed of those hours of inactivity in the pharmacy. What would she think of him, if he continued to remain there? Cost what it might, he must go.

One morning he went to Monsieur Rivals to thank him, and to announce his resolution.

"You are right," said the good man, "you are well and strong again, and you ought to work. With that certificate, it will not be hard for you to find work."

There was a moment's silence; Jack was deeply moved and somewhat disturbed by the singular expectancy of the glance Monsieur Rivals fastened upon him.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" asked the doctor suddenly.

Jack colored, much disconcerted, and replied:

"Why no, Monsieur Rivals."

"Ah! and yet I did think that when one is in love with a dear child whose only parent is an old simpleton of a grandfather he would be the one to ask for her hand."

Jack did not answer, but hid his face in his hands.

"What are you crying about, Jack? You must see for yourself that matters have not gone so badly, when I am the first to speak to you of this."

"Oh, Monsieur Rivals, is it possible—a wretched workman like me."

"Work that you may be something more. You can lift yourself. I will tell you how, if you wish."

"But that is not all, that is not all. You do not know the most terrible part of it. I am—I am—"

"Oh yes, I know, you are a bastard," said the doctor very calmly. "Well, she too is one—and worse than that—come near, my child, and listen."

III.

THE RIVALS' MISFORTUNE.

THEY were seated in the doctor's study. Through the window, a beautiful autumn landscape spread before the eye, a stretch of country roads bordered by trees stripped of their leafage, and beyond rose the old village cemetery, closed now these fifteen years, its straggling yews rising from out the tall grass, its crosses leaning in every direction, from the frequent upheavals of the burial ground, its soil upturned and disturbed far oftener than any other. "You have never been there?" asked Monsieur Rivals, pointing out for Jack the old cemetery in the distance. "You would have noticed among the briers a tall white stone with no other inscription than the name—"Madeleine." My daughter, Cécile's mother, is buried there. She wished to lie apart from us all, with only her Christian name upon her tomb, insisting that she was not worthy to bear the name of her father and mother. Dear child, so proud, so honest! And nothing could move her from that unalterable decision. You can imagine what sorrow it was for us, having lost her so young, only twenty, to think that she must rest apart alone. But the wishes of the dead must be fulfilled, for in them they survive, and are with us still. And that is

why our daughter lies there alone; it was her wish. She had done nothing to deserve this exile in death, and if any one deserved to be punished, it was I, an old fool whose everlasting and inconceivable idiocy brought about our misfortune.

"One day eighteen years ago, in this very month of November, I was summoned on account of an accident that had occurred during one of those great hunting-parties of which the forest of Sénart witnesses three or four every year. In the confusion of the battue, one of the huntsmen had received the full charge of a Lefaucheux in the leg; I found the wounded man stretched upon the big bed of the Archambaulds, whither he had been carried. He was a handsome fellow, of thirty, fair-haired and robust, his head rather thickset, heavy eyebrows, and very light eyes, those northern eyes that sparkle with the white glitter of ice. He bore admirably the extraction of the charge, which I was obliged to make shot by shot, and when the operation was ended, thanked me in very good French, with a soft, sing-song, foreign accent. As he could not be moved without danger, I continued to attend him at the gamekeeper's. I learned that he was a Russian, and of noble birth — 'Count Nadine' his hunting-companions called him.

"Although his wound was dangerous, Nadine's recovery was a speedy one, thanks to his youth and vigor, and to the excellent care of Mother Archambauld; but it was long before he was able

to walk much, and as I thought he must suffer from loneliness, and that a young man accustomed to luxury and high life must find convalescence in the forest somewhat tedious, with the leaves and branches for his horizon, and no other company than Archambauld, silently smoking his pipe, I frequently brought him home in my carriage, as I returned from my rounds. He dined with us, and sometimes, when the weather was too bad to return, he even slept in our house.

"I must confess that I grew to be very fond of the scoundrel. I don't know where he had picked up all he knew, but he knew everything. He had been a sailor, seen something of fighting, and made a tour of the world; he gave my wife the pharmaceutical recipes of his country; he taught my daughter the songs of the Ukraine. We were all of us positively under a spell, myself most of all, and when I returned home of an evening, cut by rain and wind, jolted in the gig, I rejoiced to think that I should find him at my fireside, and associated him in my thoughts with the bright group waiting for me in the dark night when the road's end was reached. My wife was not so completely under his influence as the others were, but as a habitual mistrust was a part of her character, adopted as an offset to my easy-going ways, I took no notice of this.

"However, our patient's condition improved steadily, and he was now quite well enough to finish his winter in Paris, but still he made no move. The country seemed to suit perfectly, had

some attraction for him. What could it be? It never entered my head to ask.

"But one day my wife said to me:

"'Listen to me, Rivals. Monsieur Nadine must explain matters, or else he must not come to the house so often; people are beginning to gossip on Madeleine's account.'

"'Madeleine? Nonsense! What an idea!'

"I was so stupid that I really fancied it was on my account the count still remained at Étiolles, for the game of backgammon we had every evening, for those nautical talks we held over our grog. Fool that I was! I need only have looked at my daughter's face when he entered the room, watched her change color as she bent over her embroidery, mute while he was with us, in his absence watching at a window for his coming. But no eyes are blinder than those that do not wish to see, and I was determined to remain blind. But I could not overlook the fact that Madeleine had confessed to her mother that they loved each other. I went at once in search of the count, resolved to have him explain himself.

"And he did, in such a frank, straightforward fashion that it touched my heart. He loved my daughter, and asked me for her hand without in the least concealing the obstacles that his family's obstinate pride of birth would oppose to our project. He added that he was of an age to dispense with their consent, and moreover that his own means, added to what I should give Madeleine, would be more than sufficient for the ex-

penses of their establishment; a great disparity of fortunes would have frightened me, and what he told me of the limitation of his income charmed me at once, and then he had such a noble simplicity of bearing, showed such readiness to arrange matters, to decide and sign everything, even with his eyes closed; in short, he was installed in our home as our future son-in-law, while we were still asking ourselves by what door he had entered. I felt that all this was too hasty, a little irregular, but my daughter's happiness dazed me, and when the mother said to me: 'You should make some inquiries; we ought not to leave our child's future to chance,' I laughed at her and her perpetual apprehensions. I was so sure of my man. One day, however, I spoke about him to M. de Viéville, one of the principal patrons of the shooting in the forest.

"'Upon honor, my dear Rivals,' he said, 'I know nothing whatever of Count Nadine. He impressed me as an excellent fellow; I know he bears a great name, and is well-educated. What more is needed for a day's sport together? But if I were going to give a daughter of mine to him in marriage, I should surely want to know something more than that. If I were in your place, I would make inquiries at the Russian Embassy. They ought to be able to give you all necessary information.'

"You will think, perhaps, my dear Jack, that I hastened to make inquiries at the Embassy. Well, I did not. I was too careless, rather, too indolent.

I have never in my life done what I wished to do, for lack of time. I do not know whether I lose it, or merely squander it somehow, but I do know that no matter how long I shall live, my life will have been too short by half for all that I had to do. Tormented by my wife with regard to those miserable inquiries, I lied to her at last. 'Oh, yes, yes, I attended to that; the information received was perfectly satisfactory — the genuine article, those Counts of Nadine.' Since then I have recalled the singular manner of the rascal every time he supposed I was going to Paris, or returning from it, but at that time I could see nothing, too much engrossed in those fine plans for the future which occupied the children's happy hours from morning to night. They were to live with us three months in the year, spending the rest of the time in St. Petersburg, where a fine Government position had been offered to Nadine. And even my poor wife herself ended by participating in the general confidence and rejoicing.

"The end of the winter passed in conferences and continual correspondence. The count's papers were long in coming, the parents refused their consent and all this time the attachment was growing so much stronger, the intimacy deepened to such a degree that I asked myself anxiously: 'What if the papers should not come?' But at last we received them, a package of closely written hieroglyphics almost impossible to decipher, certificates of birth, baptism, exemption from military service. What amused us all was a

whole page filled with all the titles, forenames and surnames of the intended, Ivanovitch, Nicolavitch, Stéphanovitch — an entire genealogy, that lengthened the family name with each generation. 'Really, have you as many names as that?' my poor child, whose name was plain 'Madeleine Rivals' laughingly asked. Ah! the scoundrel, he had all those, and many another!

"At first it was suggested the marriage ceremony should be performed at Paris, but Nadine reflected that it would not be wise to brave paternal authority so far, and the ceremony took place very simply at Étiolles, in the little church you know; the irreparable lie it witnessed that beautiful day is still recorded upon its register. What a day that was! and how happy I felt. Well, one must be a father to understand these things! Ah, but I was proud when I entered the church, my daughter trembling upon my arm, and overjoyed too as I told myself: 'My child is happy, and she owes her happiness to me.' Oh! the sound of the halberd under the porch will live in my heart to my dying day. And after mass came the breakfast at home, and then the departure of the children in a post-chaise, starting off upon that joyous wedding-journey together. And I saw them press closer to each other, where they sat in the back of the carriage, overcome by the double intoxication of their journey and their happiness, and driving off amid a gay cloud of dust to the music of bells, and cracks of the whip.

"At such times those who start off with their journey before them are happy enough, but the ones left behind are sad indeed. When we seated ourselves at table that evening, the mother and I, that empty place between us gave us a real idea of our loneliness. And then everything had happened so quickly that we were unprepared for the separation. We gazed at each other, stupefied. I had my life outside, my practice, my patients. But the poor mother was compelled to meet her grief in every corner of the house that reminded her of the absent one. This is women's lot. All their joys and sorrows they find within the home, bound so inseparably and securely to its life, that they are reminded of them by so slight a thing as a closet they are setting to rights, or some bit of embroidery they are finishing. Happily the letters we received from Pisa, from Florence, were overflowing with love and sunshine. Besides, our thoughts were busy with the children. I was planning to build a little house for them beside our own. There were hangings and paper and furniture to be chosen. And every day we talked of the pair. 'They are here; they are there; they are farther away; they are nearer home.' And then came a day when we were expecting those last hurried letters that announce that the wanderer is returning, and hopes to reach home before them.

"One evening I had returned very late from my rounds and was dining alone, for my wife had gone to bed; suddenly I heard a quick step in

the garden; it ascended the staircase, and then the door opened. It was my daughter. No longer the beautiful girl of a month before, but a wretched child, pale, thin, and so changed; clad in a poor, shabby dress, a travelling bag in her hand a wild bewildered, agonized expression in her face!

"'It is I; here I am.'

"'Good God! what has happened to you? And where is Nadine?'

"She did not answer but closed her eyes, and began to tremble, a shiver that shook her whole body. You can imagine my suspense.

"'For Heaven's sake, speak to me child. Where is your husband?'

"'I have none — none now; I never had one.'

"And then, sitting beside me, where you are sitting now, in a low voice and eyes averted from mine, she told me her horrible story.

"He was not a count, his name was not Nadine. He was a Russian Jew, named Roesch, a miserable adventurer, a roving vagabond, one of those Jacks-of-all-trades who stick to none. He had been married in Riga, married again in St. Petersburg. All his papers were false, manufactured by himself. What means he possessed he owed to the skill with which he forged Russian banknotes. He had been arrested at Turin upon an extradition order, and my poor little girl was alone in a strange city, torn by force from her husband, having learned that he was a bigamist and a forger, for the wretch had confessed everything to her.

Imagine her situation! She had but a single thought, to take refuge here with us. Her brain was so dazed, she told us later that at the station, when the clerk asked her where she was going, the right words would not come, and she answered 'Home to mamma.' So she fled, leaving in the hotel her dresses, her jewels, and all the infamous wretch had given her, and she reached us without making a single stop in her journey. And here she was, sheltered once more in the nest, and weeping for the first time since the catastrophe. I said to her:

"'Hush, try to calm yourself, you will wake your mother.'

"But my own weeping was louder than hers. The following day my wife learned all. She did not reproach me in the least. 'I knew well,' she said, 'that this marriage was destined to bring us misfortune.' She had had some such presentiment from the first day that the man had set foot within our house. Ah! they talk sometimes of the skill with which the doctor makes his diagnosis, but what is that in comparison with those forewarnings, those confidences that fate whispers in the ears of some women? The fact of my daughter's return soon spread through the neighborhood.

"'Ah, Monsieur Rivals! so it seems our travellers have returned.'

"And I was asked for information and news of them, but my manner soon made people understand that something was wrong. It was observed

that the count had not returned, that Madeleine and her mother never went out, and soon I felt myself surrounded by a compassion and sympathy that were worse than all the rest.

"I did not at that time know the full extent of our misfortune. Madeleine had not confided her secret to me: a child was to be born of this dishonorable, illegal, mock-union. What a sad house ours was in those days! My wife and I sat crushed and mute, and Madeleine sewed at her baby-linen, trimming with laces and ribbons those small garments that are the joy and pride of a mother, but at which she could not look without shame, at least, so I believed. At the least allusion to the wretch who had deceived her, she trembled and grew pale; the thought of having belonged to such a thing as that, seemed to trouble her as though she had been sullied by it. But my wife, who read her better than I, said to me frequently: 'You are mistaken, I am sure that she loves him still.' Yes, she loved him still and, however deep were her contempt and hate, love was stronger in her heart. And indeed it was that which killed her, her remorse at continuing to love one who was utterly unworthy; for she lived only a little longer, dying a few days after she had given birth to our little Cécile. It seemed as if she had waited only for that, to pass away. We found under her pillow a folded letter worn at the creases, the only letter Nadine had written her before their marriage, its lines effaced and blotted with tears, she must have read and reread it very

often, but she was too proud to admit as much, and she died without even once naming the name that, I am sure, trembled upon her lips.

"It surprises you, does it not, my child, that a happy little home in a village should have witnessed one of those dark and complex dramas that seem possible only in the confusion of a great city like London or Paris? When fate strikes a chance blow like this at some quiet corner, hidden behind hedges and alder-bushes, it makes me think of one of those stray bullets sped during a battle, killing some laborer by the side of a field, or a child returning from school—the same blind barbarism!

"I believe that if we had not had little Cécile, my wife would have soon followed her daughter. Her life from that day was one long silence, filled with regrets and reproach. You saw what it was. But there was the child to be reared, to bring up at home, keeping her in complete ignorance of the misfortune of her birth. It was a terrible task we had undertaken. It is true that we were rid forever of the father, who died some months after receiving his sentence. Unfortunately, two or three persons in the neighborhood knew the entire history. We had to keep Cécile out of reach of all gossip, especially that naïvely cruel sort of which children have the secret, and repeat with smiling lips and bright eyes, innocent reporters of all they hear. You know how lonely the little one was before she met you. Thanks, however, to our precautions, she is ignorant even to this very

day of the terrible tempest that attended her birth. We told her merely that she was an orphan, and in explanation of the name Rivals that she bears, informed her that her mother had married in the family.

"But what better proof that there are many kind people in the world than the fact that in a little village like ours, so accustomed to gossip and scandal, there was a tacit understanding that there should be no mention of our misfortune? Among those who knew, there was not one who ever made the least painful allusion to it in Cécile's presence, or uttered even a word that could have given her the slightest suspicion of the drama that was enacted beside her cradle. But that did not prevent the poor grandmother from being a prey to constant anxiety. She was especially afraid of the child's questionings, and I was as much afraid as she, but other apprehensions of a graver and more cruel nature disturbed me. The mysteries of heredity are so terrible! Who could say whether my daughter's daughter had not brought with her at her birth some frightful instinct, that inheritance of vice which such scoundrels sometimes leave to their children in default of any other fortune? Yes, I can say it to you, Jack, who know this miracle of grace and purity, I was constantly afraid I might see some trace of the father in those angelic features, discover in that true voice some inheritance of the father's, perverted still further by the coquettish resources of a woman. But what joy and pride were mine

when I saw the exquisite and refined image of the mother perfected in the child, like one of those portraits drawn from memory, still lovelier because there has been added the charm, the intensity of a regret. I recognized the kindly, merry smile, the eyes so tender but so proud, prouder even than Madeleine's, the benevolent but severe mouth that knew so well how to say 'No,' and all the rectitude of the grandmother, her courage and strength of will.

"And yet the thought of the future frightened me. It would not always be possible to keep my granddaughter in ignorance of her misfortune and ours. There are occasions when the registers of the Mairie are thrown wide open, and upon that of Étiolles was inscribed this melancholy bit of information with regard to her birth, 'father unknown.' For us the terrible moment would come when Cécile should marry.

"What would happen if she should fall in love with a man who upon learning the truth would withdraw, unwilling to marry an illegitimate child, the daughter of a forger?

"'She shall love none but us; she will never marry,' said the grandmother. But would that be possible? And what after we were gone? What sadness and what danger for beauty like hers to go through life unprotected. And yet what could be done? A destiny so exceptional could only be united with one equally exceptional. But where to find it? Not in the village where the life of every family is public property,

as openly exposed to the light of day as an espalier — and where every one knows his neighbor's affairs, watches, and sits in judgment. In Paris we knew no one, and besides, Paris is an abyss. And then your mother came to live in the neighborhood. Every one thought she was married to that fellow, d'Argenton, but when I began to see more of them, old Mother Archambauld warned me in private of the irregular character of the establishment. A sudden light dawned within me; I said to myself as I looked at you: 'There is the husband for Cécile.' From that moment I looked upon you as my grandson, and began to instruct you, to train you.

"Oh! after the lesson, when I saw you both sitting together in a corner of the pharmacy, so happy, so united, you stronger and taller than she, and she already wiser than you, it filled me with emotion and tender pity at sight of that growing affection which was bringing you every day nearer each other. And the more Cécile opened her simple little soul to you, the more your intelligence developed, gravitating, ever eager to learn, towards great and beautiful things, the prouder, the more charmed I was with my plan. I had anticipated everything. I saw you at twenty, coming to me and saying:

"'Grandfather, we love each other.'

"And I would reply:

"'And indeed you ought to love each other, poor little fatherless ones, for through life you must be everything to each other.'

"That is why you saw me so terribly incensed when that man wished to make a workman of you. It seemed to me that it was my child, the husband of my little Cécile he was tearing away from me. All my wonderful plan suddenly collapsed, as terrible a fall as that which plunged you into action. How I cursed all those idiots with their humanitarian schemes. And yet I still had one hope. I said to myself: 'Hard trials at the outset are sometimes the making of a man. If Jack looks beyond his wretched condition, if he reads enough, and keeps constantly in mind his ideal, while he continues to work with his arms, he will remain worthy of the wife I have chosen for him.' The letters we received from you, so tender, so elevated in tone, confirmed me in these ideas. We read them together, Cécile and I, and talked of you constantly.

"Suddenly came the news of that theft. Ah, my friend, I was terrified. How I hated the weakness of your mother, the tyranny of that monster who had started you upon the wrong road. I respected, however, the sympathy, the tenderness, stored for you in my child's heart. I had not the courage to undeceive her, waiting until she should be older, her reason more developed, better able to bear her first disappointment. Moreover, I understood perfectly from the example her mother had given, that there is a quickening soil where every seed planted takes firm root, and merely fortifies itself against all resistance. I knew that the thought of you was rooted in that little heart,

and I depended upon time and forgetfulness to uproot the thought. But no, it was not to be. I perceived that clearly the day after I had met you at the gamekeeper's and I informed Cécile that you would visit us the next day. If you had seen her eyes sparkle, and how she worked all that day! With her that is always a sign; great emotions reveal themselves by an increased activity, as if her heart, beating too rapidly, needed to calm itself, the regular movement of her pen or her needle.

"Now, Jack, listen to me, you love my child, do you not? The question now is how to win her, gain her consent, by raising yourself out of the condition into which your mother's blindness has caused you to sink. I have watched you now for two months. Morally and physically all is favorable. Now this is what you are to do. Study to be a doctor, and you shall succeed me here at Étiolles. At first I thought of keeping you here, but I have calculated that it would take four years of hard work before you could become a medical officer, which is all that is needed in a country-town and all this time your presence here would recall in the neighborhood the sad story I have just told you. Besides, it is hard for a young man to be unable to earn his daily bread. In Paris you can divide your time into two parts; you can work in the daytime, and study evenings in your room, or attend the clinics and courses that are a part of the life of learned and studious Paris. Every Sunday we shall expect you here.

I will examine your work during the week, and the sight of Cécile will give you new strength. I have no doubt that you will succeed, and speedily. That which you are going to undertake, Velpeau and others have done. Will you try it? Cécile is the reward."

Jack was so moved, so overcome, what he had just heard was so touching, so remarkable, the vista opening before him seemed so beautiful, that he could not find a single word, and his only reply was to throw himself upon the good man's neck.

But a single doubt, a single fear still troubled him. Perhaps Cécile's affection for him was only that of a sister. And besides, four years was a long time. Would she consent to wait till they were ended?

"Well! my boy," said Monsieur Rivals gaily, "those are quite personal matters for which I cannot answer, but I give you permission to find out for yourself. She is upstairs. I heard her go up just now, go and speak to her."

Speak to her! No easy task! To try to speak when the heart throbs as if it would burst and speech is choked by emotion.

Cécile was writing in the pharmacy. Never before had she appeared to Jack so beautiful, so imposing, not even upon the day when he saw her again for the first time after seven years' absence. But what a change in himself since that day! His features had regained a beauty that ennobled them, and deprived his gestures

of the timidity that he had felt in his degraded condition. He was none the less humble in her presence.

"Cécile," he said, "I am going away."

At the announcement of his departure, she rose, very pale.

"I am going back to hard labor again. But now my life has an object. Your grandfather has given me permission to tell you that I love you, and am going to work to win you."

He trembled, and his voice was so low that any other than Cécile could not have understood what he said. But she heard every word, and while from every corner of the great room the dead past awoke and quivered in the rays of the setting sun, the young girl listened to this declaration of love that echoed every thought, every dream of hers for the past ten years. And such a strange child she was that instead of blushing and hiding her face as a proper young person is supposed to do upon such an occasion, she remained standing, a beautiful smile reflected in her eyes, though they were full of tears. She knew that this love would bring many trials, would be accompanied by long waiting and all the pain of separation, but she gathered up all her strength to give Jack more courage.

When he had ended the explanation of his plans to her:

"Jack," she replied, offering him the faithful little hand, "I will wait four years for you; I will wait for you forever, my dear."

IV.

THE MATE.

"I SAY, La Balafre, do you know of any job at iron-working? Here is a lad come from one of the steamers, and wants something to do."

The man nicknamed La Balafre, a tall fellow in a pea-jacket and a cap, his face crossed by a long scar bearing witness to a former accident, approached the counter, for it is nearly always in some wine-shop of the neighborhood that the workman hunts for a job; La Balafre eyed the newcomer presented to him from head to foot, and felt of his muscle. "Not much of an arm, that!" he said, with quite a professional air, "but if he is used to stoking —"

"Three years," said Jack.

"Well, that shows you are stronger than you look. Go to Eyssendeck's the big firm in the Rue Oberkampf; they need hands at the stamping-machine and the coining-press. You can tell the foreman that La Balafre sent you. And now you may pay for the quartern of a bottle." [1]

Jack paid for the quartern as requested, went to the address given him, and an hour later, having been engaged to work at Eyssendeck's at six

[1] There is the *canon du litre*, and the *canon de la bouteille*. The latter is the more elegant term.

francs a day, he walked along the Rue du Faubourg du Temple, his eyes sparkling, his head erect, as he went in search of a lodging that should not be too far from his work. Night was descending but the street was full of animation, for it was Monday, which is somewhat of a holiday in those out-of-the-way quarters, and upon the long, sloping road a steady stream of people passed, either on their way to the city, or ascending towards the ancient barrier; the public-houses were open and crowds poured from them, filling the sidewalks. Beneath the great *portes-cochères* carts and drays, unharnessed, their shafts turned upward, announced that the day's work was ended. What tumult there was, especially beyond the canal, what a swarm of people upon the rough, steep pavement, upturned in places, as if in anticipation of revolution, by all those little handcarts that plough over it incessantly, passing along the gutters, loaded with victuals, low-priced vegetables and fish exposed for sale, a whole peripatetic market at which the working women, poor creatures, working away from their homes all day, buy the supper for the family just before preparing it! And then the market cries, cries so characteristic of Paris, some of them gay and rising to shrill notes, others so droning and monotonous that they seemed to drag after them the entire burden of the merchandise they advertised:

Young pigeons to sell!
Dabs to fry — to fry!
Water-cress, a penny a bunch!

In the midst of all this animation, Jack passed on, his head in the air, and scanning by the last dim daylight the yellow placards of lodgings to let. He was happy, filled with courage and hopefulness, impatient to begin the double life of workman and student that was soon to be his. The crowd shoved and jostled him, but he was not aware of it. He did not feel the cold of that December evening, never noticed the slovenly little workgirls say to each other as they passed him, "There's a handsome man." But the great faubourg seemed in harmony with his gayety and confidence, encouraged him with that persistent good-humor which is the foundation of the careless and easy-going Parisian character. Just then the tattoo resounded through the street, and a serried group, scarcely distinct, was added to the crowd; they marched with regular tread to a lively and tuneful Angelus, which the gamins whistled, in accompaniment. And the faces of all were beaming, merely because of that vivacious note that startled the surrounding fatigue.

"What happiness just to be alive! How I will work!" said Jack to himself, as he went along. Suddenly he stumbled against a great basket, square as an organ, and filled with felt hats and caps. The sight of this basket leaning against the wall recalled Bélisaire's physiognomy to him. The hamper alone resembled his, but what completed the resemblance was the fact that it stood in front of a shop that smelt of wax and leather, and displayed in its narrow window several rows

of strong soles ornamented with solid and glistening nails.

Jack recalled the constant suffering of his friend the peddler, and that unsatisfied longing of his for a pair of shoes made according to his measure; a glance into the shop revealed the clumsy and grotesque figure of the peddler himself, as ugly as ever, but to all appearance, much neater, and better dressed than of old. Jack was really delighted at finding him again, and after knocking in vain upon the pane several times, he entered without being perceived by the peddler, so absorbed was the latter in the contemplation of a pair of shoes which the shopkeeper was showing him. It was not for himself that he was buying these shoes, but for a very small boy four or five years of age, with a very big ill-balanced head, set upon very lean shoulders. While the shoemaker tried on the boots, Bélisaire chatted to the little one with his amiable smile:

"Those feel comfortable, don't they, darling? Who will have warm tootsey-wootsies after this? My little friend Weber, eh?"

The apparition of Jack did not appear to surprise him in the least.

"Why! so you are here!" he said, as unmoved as though he had seen him the evening before.

"Good-day, Bélisaire, what are you doing here? Is this little boy yours?"

"Oh no! that is Madame Weber's little one," answered the peddler with a sigh that evidently implied: "I wish that he were mine."

He added, turning to the shopkeeper: "Now you are sure these are large enough? That he has plenty of room to move his toes in them? It is misery to wear boots that hurt."

And the poor devil looked at his own feet with a despairing glance which showed plainly that if he was rich enough to buy boots specially fitted to Madame Weber's little boy, he was not able to afford them for himself.

At last, after he had asked the child at least twenty times whether he was comfortable in the shoes, and had made him walk about and stamp his feet on the floor, the peddler slowly drew from his pocket a long red woollen purse with rings, and took from it a few pieces of silver, which he put into the shopkeeper's hand with that air of deliberation and importance assumed by the common people when it is a question of parting with money.

When they were outside, he asked of Jack: "Where are you going, comrade?" in a significant tone that seemed to say: "If you are going this way, I prefer to take the other."

Jack, who felt this coldness, without being able to explain the cause, replied, "Really, I don't know where I am going. I am a journeyman at Eyssendeck's and I am looking for a lodging not too far from my shop."

"Eyssendeck's!" said the peddler, who knew all the factories of the neighborhood, "it is not easy to get in there; one must have a good certificate."

And he winked at Jack, to whom the words "a

good certificate" brought sudden enlightenment. Bélisaire labored under the same mistaken idea as did Monsieur Rivals. He still believed that Jack had stolen the six thousand francs. So true is it that accusations, even when unjust, leave their indelible stain. But when Bélisaire had learned what had happened at Indret, when he had seen the manager's statement, the expression of his countenance suddenly changed, and that charmingly amiable grimace of his illumined his dull face as in the good days of old.

"Look here, Jack, it is too late now to look for a lodging[1] to-night. You must come with me, for I am on my own hook now, and I have a splendid lodging where you can sleep for the night. But if — if — I have a famous plan to propose to you — But we can talk of that later, when we are eating. Come, forward, march!" And so the three went on together, Jack, the peddler, and Madame Weber's little boy, whose new shoes made a great noise upon the pavement, as they climbed the suburb, towards Ménilmontant, where Bélisaire lived, Rue des Panoyaux. As they proceeded, he informed Jack that he had returned to Paris with his sister, at her husband's death, that he no longer tramped the country with his hats, and business was not at all dull with him. From time to time in the midst of his history he would stop long enough to cry "Hats! hats! hats!" as he went over the road where he was known by all the manufactories.

[1] *Marchand de sommeil.* Parisian argot for the keeper of a low lodging-house. — TR.

Before the end of the journey, he was obliged to take Madame Weber's boy in his arms, for the child was complaining and moaning in a low voice.

"Poor child," said Bélisaire, "he is not used to walking; he never goes out, and I have just had this fine pair of shoes made to measure for him so that I may take him with me sometimes. The mother is away all day long; she is a bread-carrier, and a tiresome trade it is, let me tell you, and a true, brave woman she is. She goes out at five o'clock in the morning, carries bread until noon, comes home to eat a mouthful, and then returns to the bakery until evening. The child remains at home all this time. A neighbor looks after him, and when no one has time to attend to him, he is fastened into his chair in front of the table, because of the matches. There, here we are!"

They entered one of those great tenement-houses peopled by the working-class, pierced by innumerable narrow windows, and crossed by long passages where the poor set up their kitchens, hang their clothing, and leave everything that overcrowds their restricted space. The doors open upon this annex, giving a glimpse of rooms dense with smoke, and full of crying children. At that hour every one was dining. Jack, as he passed, saw people at table, lighted by a single candle, or heard the clatter of the coarse crockery upon the wood of the table.

"Good appetite to you, friends," said the peddler.

"Good evening, Bélisaire," came the answer from

mouths full of food, from joyous and friendly voices. But in some of these rooms they met a sadder sight; no fire, not even a light; a wife and children waiting for the father to return and bring to them whatever little remained of Saturday's pay. The peddler's room was on the sixth floor, at the end of the corridor. Jack saw all the wretched interiors of these working men's homes, huddled together like the cells of a hive; his friend occupied the topmost one; and very proud of it was this poor Bélisaire.

"You shall see how comfortable I am, Jack, and how much room I have. But wait a minute. Before we go in, I must take the little one to Madame Weber's."

At the door of the room next to his own, he searched under the mat for a key, opened the door with the air of a man thoroughly familiar with the habits of the house, went straight to the stove where the evening's soup had been simmering since noon, lighted a candle, and placed the child in his high chair in front of the table, giving him two saucepan-lids to divert him.

"Now," he said, "let us be off quickly. Madame Weber will soon be back, and I am curious to hear what she will say when she sees the little one's new shoes. It will be a great sight. She will never suspect where they came from; she has no way of finding out. There are so many people in the house, and they are all so fond of her! Ah, there will be great sport."

He laughed to think of it, — as he opened the

door of his room, a long attic-room divided in two by a sort of glazed alcove. A pile of hats and caps proclaimed the calling of the peddler, and the bareness of the walls bore witness to his poverty.

"Why! Bélisaire," asked Jack, "don't you live with your relatives now?"

"No," answered the peddler, scratching his head, his custom when slightly embarrassed. "You see, large families do not always get on well together. Madame Weber did not think it was fair that I should work for all, and never get anything for myself. She advised me to live away from the rest, and now I earn twice what I did, and am able to support my relatives and still lay by something for myself. It is to Madame Weber I owe this. I tell you that woman has a head!"

As he talked, Bélisaire lighted his lamp, put away his goods, and busied himself in getting the dinner, a fine potato-salad, seasoned with red herrings at which he had been working hard for the last three days, so that it had now become a pickle of a very strong flavor. He then drew from a wooden cupboard two figured plates, a tin dish, a wooden dish, bread, wine, and a bunch of radishes, all of which he placed upon a rickety sideboard, put together like the cupboard, by a joiner of the neighborhood. Nevertheless, the peddler was very proud of the furniture of his room, and would speak of THE CUPBOARD, THE SIDEBOARD, as if they were models of what furniture should be.

"And now we can sit in to table," he said,

pointing triumphantly to the board, upon which a newspaper had been spread out to serve as a tablecloth, the daily news lying under Jack's plate, and the political bulletin between the bread and the radishes. "Well, it can't compare with that famous leg of ham you gave me in the country. Lord! Lord! what a ham that was! I have never eaten one to compare with it."

Without any flattery, the potatoes were excellent too, and Jack did justice to them. Bélisaire, delighted at the appetite of his guest, kept pace with him valiantly, fulfilling meanwhile his duties as master of the house, getting up every now and then to attend to the water, boiling upon the cinders and to grind the coffee between his crooked knees.

"I say, Bélisaire," Jack remarked, "you are provided with everything! You can really keep house here."

"Oh, some of the things do not belong to me. Madame Weber has lent them to me until —"

"Until when, Bélisaire."

"Until we are married," replied the peddler bravely, but with two patches of red upon his cheeks. Then, perceiving that Jack did not laugh at him, he went on. "This marriage is an affair we agreed upon some time ago. For me it is a great and unhoped-for happiness. I had never expected that Madame Weber would consent to marry again. She was so unhappy with her first, a ruffian who drank, and beat her when he was drunk. Oh! what a sin to raise a hand against

such a woman as that! You will see her soon, when she comes in. So courageous! so good! Ah, I promise you, I will never beat her, and if she wishes to beat me—well, I 'll let her!"

"And when do you intend to be married?" asked Jack.

"Oh, at once, if I had my way, but Madame Weber, who is reason itself, thinks provisions are too high at present, and that we are not rich enough to start alone, and she wants to find a mate."

"A mate?"

"Why, yes. That is often done here among poor people. We look for a mate, either a bachelor or a widower, to room with us and share the expenses of food and lodging. You can see what a saving that is for everybody. It costs no more for three than for two. But it is hard to find a good mate, one who is reliable, hard-working, and who does not turn the house upside down."

"Well, Bélisaire, would I do? Am I reliable enough? Would I suit you?"

"Really, Jack, are you willing? I thought of it an hour ago, but I did not dare to speak to you about it."

"And why not?"

"Well, I 'll tell you. We are so poor. We live in such a small way. Perhaps our fare would be too plain for a mechanic who earns his six and seven francs a day."

"No, no, Bélisaire, your fare would not be too plain for me. I too must economize, be as prudent

as possible, for I am also thinking of getting married."

"What? Then you won't do for us," exclaimed the peddler in consternation. Jack laughed at this and explained that his marriage would not take place for four years, and then only upon condition that he worked very hard.

"Very well, then, agreed; you shall be our mate, and a good, steady one you will make. How lucky it is that we met again! When I think that if I had not taken it into my head to buy those shoes — hush! Listen. That is Madame Weber coming in. Now we shall have a laugh."

A terribly masculine step, hasty and energetic, shook the staircase and the banister. The child must have heard it, for he began to bawl like a young calf, pounding his saucepan-lids upon the table.

"Yes, yes, it is I, darling. Don't cry, my pet," called the bread-carrier consoling her child from the end of the corridor.

"Listen," said Bélisaire in a low voice. They heard a door open, and then an exclamation followed by a burst of fresh and hearty laughter. Bélisaire's face the while was furrowed and wrinkled with delight.

This noisy gayety, which, owing to the thinness of the partitions, spread all along the upper story, came nearer and nearer to the two friends, and at last made its way into the attic in the form of a strapping, vigorous daughter of the people, from thirty to thirty-five years of age, her robust and

shapely figure closely outlined by one of those long blue-bibbed smocks worn by bread-carriers to protect themselves from flour.

"Oh, you sly rogue!" she exclaimed as she entered, with the boy on her arm. "It is you who played that trick upon me. But look, will you, and see how finely my boy is shod!"

She laughed and laughed, but with something very like a tear in the corner of her eye.

"Now, is n't she sharp, eh?" asked Bélisaire, convulsed with laughter. "How did she ever guess that it was I?"

When this outburst of joy had subsided a little, Madame Weber seated herself at table, and took a cup of coffee in something that might have been an old mustard-pot, and then Jack was presented to her as the future mate. I must admit that at first she received the idea with a certain reserve, but after she had examined the candidate for this supreme distinction, when she had learned that Jack and Bélisaire had known each other for ten years, and that she saw before her the hero of the story of that famous leg of ham, which she had heard so many times, her face lost some of its mistrust, and she held out her hand to Jack.

"Well, I see that this time Bélisaire has not been mistaken. Since you know him, you know what a good-natured simpleton he is. He has brought me more than half-a-dozen mates already, and not one of them was worth the rope it would take to hang him. He is so good himself that he

is really a ninny. If I were to tell you all that family of his have made him suffer! He has been their victim, their beast of burden. He has supported them all, and he got nothing but abuse in return."

"Oh, Madame Weber!" remonstrated the worthy peddler, who did not like to hear any one speak ill of his family.

"Well! and why, 'Oh, Madame Weber?' I must explain to your mate why I separated you from all that tribe, or it would look as if I had acted in my own interest, like many another woman. Come now! are n't you really happier, living away from them, and making a little yourself out of your work?"

She went on, addressing herself to Jack. "In spite of all I can do, they still get everything they can out of him. They send him the youngest ones, for there is a whole swarm of curly-headed children, with fingers as crooked and bent already as Father Bélisaire's. They come here when I am away, and they always manage to carry off something with them. I am telling you all this, Jack, that you may help me to protect him against others and against himself; the rascal is too good-hearted by half."

"You may depend upon me, Madame Weber."

Then they were busied with arrangements for getting the mate settled. It was decided that until the marriage he should live with Bélisaire, and sleep in the larger room, upon a folding-bed. They would have their meals together, and Jack

should pay his share of the expense of food and lodging every Saturday. After the wedding they would look for larger quarters, a little nearer to Eyssendeck's.

While these weighty matters were discussed, Madame Weber, her child asleep upon her arm, prepared the mate's bed, cleared away the table, and washed the dishes, while Bélisaire set to work sewing straw hats, and Jack without losing a minute, packed away the books Doctor Rivals had given him in a corner of the closet, as if to take possession of this home of workers and to put himself in unison with the worthy folk it contained.

A few days ago, when he was still at Étiolles, it would have surprised him greatly had any one told him that he would begin his workman's life again with ardor, without a feeling of humiliation or fatigue, that he would return to that hell with a light heart. And yet, so it was. Yes, it was indeed a hell that he must traverse for the second time, but at the end of it Eurydice patiently awaited him in her bridal robe; he knew this and the thought of the reward of all his efforts and toil made the road easy for him.

His new workshop in the Rue Oberkampf reminded him of Indret on a smaller scale. Here, as space was limited, there were in the same room three rows of benches and machines, one above another. Jack was placed upon the top staging, under a glazed roof, where all the din of the workshop, its steam and dust, ascended and mingled. When he leaned against the railing that ran along

the gallery where he was working, he could see all that terrible human machinery, constantly in motion, the smiths at their forges, the mechanics at their work, and below, clad in blouses that gave them the appearance of young apprentices, were women busied with the finer details of the work.

The heat was suffocating, even more stifling than at Indret, for here there was not open space and the sea-breeze above the over-heated shops; but, on the contrary, this immense building was hemmed in among a long row of manufactories, its windows facing theirs, for all these fatiguing trades lived side by side. What did it matter to Jack? He was inured to suffering now, and could endure everything; he felt himself as far above the difficulties and annoyances of his calling as in the workshop he was removed from, and above the crowd of laborers whose struggle reached his ears as if resounding along the dome of some cathedral. He was to be there only for a time, and though he did his work conscientiously, his thoughts were always elsewhere. His comrades soon understood this. They saw that he lived a life apart from them, indifferent to their quarrels and rivalries. Their conspiracies against the "boss" or the foreman, their brawling as they left the works, the new-comers, paying for their footing, the long halts in various *assommoirs*,[1] *con-*

[1] *Assommoir.* Any low drinking shop, probably derived from *assommer*, to knock over the head.

Consolations. Brandy-shops. Parisian argot for *eau-de-vie* is *consolation.*

Mine à poivre. Another cant-term for a low brandy-shop.

solations, and *mines à poivre*. Jack held aloof from all of these, and shared neither the pleasures nor the hatreds of the others. He heard neither the sullen muttering nor the rebellious grumbling of the great faubourg, lost like some ghetto in the midst of the magnificent city, making the surrounding luxury still more brilliant by the contrast of its rags and tatters. He heard nothing of those socialistic theories that misery whispers in the ear of those unfortunates deprived of everything, and living too near the prosperous not to desire a general upheaval of things that might suddenly transform the wretchedness of their lot. History and politics as expounded over the bar by La Balafre, Big Louis, or François la Bouteille left him quite unmoved, for the history was a medley derived from penny-literature, plays or romances of Dumas, and all its heroes were taken from the Ambigu. It cannot be said that his comrades felt any friendship for him, but they respected him. He had answered their first pleasantries of a coarser sort with such a keen clear glance of his light eyes, such a determined expression, that the jest was hushed upon their lips; and besides, they knew he had been a stoker, and the battles fought with their stoking-bars among these men have made them famous characters among mechanics.

In the eyes of the men that was enough to stir a feeling of fellowship; in the eyes of the women he possessed another sort of prestige, the glory that shines from the faces of those who love and

are loved in turn. His tall fine figure held erect now by an effort of the will, the neatness of his dress, made him appear in the eyes of these working-girls who had all read *The Mysteries of Paris*, like some Prince Rodolphe in search of a Fleur-de-Marie. And many a faded smile these poor girls threw away upon him when he crossed their corner of the shop, which was always full of gossip, and never without some drama of its own, for there was scarcely one of them that had not a lover in the works, and these intimacies led to jealousies, ruptures, and scenes without end. At the lunch-hour whilst they ate their meagre meal on the edge of the work-bench, there were lively discussions among these creatures who had not ceased to be women, — dressed their hair for the workshop as for a ball, and in spite of iron filings and the stains their work had left, managed to adorn their locks with a ribbon, a gaudy pin, the last solitary bit of coquetry that remained to them.

Jack always left the factory alone, and hastened to reach his lodging, to throw off his workman's blouse, and change his occupation. Surrounded by his books, small school-books, upon whose margins his childhood had left many a mark, he began the work of the evening, surprised again and again at the ease with which he recalled things, the classical word reviving in his mind the lessons he had learned long ago. He knew far more than he had expected. And yet at times unexpected difficulties sprang up between the lines, and it was touching to see this great fellow

whose hands grew more and more out of shape each day, from his work at the coining-press, struggle to hold a pen, brandish it, and sometimes throw it from him in a burst of anger at his own awkwardness. Bélisaire sat beside him, sewing the vizors of his caps, or the straw of his summer hats in religious silence, with all the amazement of a savage assisting at some magic incantation. He actually perspired at the efforts Jack made, sat open-mouthed, grew impatient, and when Jack had reached the end of some difficult passage, nodded his head with a triumphant air. The noise of the peddler's big needle pulled through the coarse straw, of the student's pen scratching the paper, and of his big dictionaries, too heavy to be moved without sound, filled the garret with the calm and healthy atmosphere of work, and when Jack lifted his eyes he saw behind the panes other lamps burning industriously, and the shadowy figures of other workers courageously prolonging their toil of the evening, all the reverse side of a Parisian night, all that gleams from its courtyards while the boulevards are brilliantly lighted.

Towards the middle of the evening, her child in bed and asleep, Madame Weber, in order to economize coal and oil, would come in and work with the two friends. She mended the child's clothing, Bélisaire's and the mate's. It was decided that the marriage should not take place till spring, as winter brings the poor added burdens, expense and anxiety. Meanwhile, the two lovers worked

courageously side by side, which is really one way of courting. It was already the household of three they had planned, but it seemed to Bélisaire that there was still something lacking, for, seated at the bread-carrier's side, he assumed various attitudes of deep dejection, uttering hoarse, heavy sighs such as the great African turtle heaves beneath his thick shell during mating-season, so the naturalists have told us. At intervals he made attempts to take Madame Weber's hand, and hold it a while in his own, but she found that this hindered work, and they contented themselves with keeping time with their needles, talking together in low tones with that hissing sound common to coarse voices under restraint.

Jack never turned around, for he feared to embarrass them, but as he wrote, he thought to himself, "How happy they are!" He was happy only when Sunday arrived, the day when he went to Étiolles.

Never did any belle take more pains with her toilette than Jack on this great day, by the light of a lamp, burning from five o'clock. Madame Weber herself got ready his linen beforehand, and his best suit was laid out on the back of a chair. And greatly in demand were lemon-juice and pumice-stone to remove the stains work had made! He was anxious nothing should remind him that he was merely a hired laborer during the week. And the work-girls at Eyssendeck's would surely have taken him for Prince Rodolphe, had they seen him set out for Étiolles.

Blissful day, that was not made up, like other days, of hours and minutes. It was one long, uninterrupted felicity. The whole household expected his coming, and welcomed him, even the fire lighted in the dining-room, the bunches of green upon the mantelpiece, the gayety of the doctor and the emotion of Cécile, whose face, merely at sight of her lover, was overspread with a blush such as a kiss might have left. As in the old days when they were children, he recited his lesson before her, and the young girl's intelligent glance encouraged him, helped him to understand. Monsieur Rivals corrected his exercises for the week, explained them, and assigned new ones, and the teacher was as courageous in all this as the pupil, for every Sunday afternoon, usually kept free by the old doctor, except for unexpected visits, was now devoted almost exclusively to reviewing the books of his youth, marking and annotating them for the use of a beginner. The lesson over, when time permitted they took a turn in the shivering, crackling forest, blighted with frost and stripped of its leaves, startled rabbits and roebucks making for the open at their appearance.

This was the most delightful part of the whole day.

The good doctor purposely slackened his pace, allowing the young people to pass before him; they walked on arm-in-arm, striving to make each other confidences which his naïve simplicity disturbed a little. He would have set them at their

ease too quickly, and they were still enjoying those happy moments in which love is divined rather than spoken. Although they told each other merely the happenings of the past week, there were long silences, audible as music, the discreet and passionate accompaniment of this operatic duet.

To enter that part of the forest called Grand Sénard, they must pass Les Aulnettes, which Doctor Hirsch continued to visit from time to time, that he might make his experiments upon the therapeutics of perfumes. It would seem that all the herbs of forest and field were burning there, judging by the thick smoke that rose from the roof, catching one by the throat with its aromatic bitterness.

"Ah, ha! The poisoner is there," Monsieur Rivals would say to the young people. "Do you smell his infernal cookery?"

Cécile tried to silence him.

"Take care, grandfather; he might hear you."

"Eh? Let him hear me! Do you think I am afraid of him? No danger of his stirring from the spot, not he! From the day when I took our friend Jack out of his clutches, he has known that old Rivals has still a good, strong arm of his own."

But in spite of all he said, the young people lowered their voices and quickened their steps until they had left *Parva domus* behind them. They knew that no good could come to them from that house, and seemed to feel the venom-

ous glance shot through Doctor Hirsch's spectacles as he watched from behind the closed shutters. And yet, what had they to fear from the espionage of this fantastic creature? What further communication could there be between d'Argenton and Charlotte's son? They had not seen each other for three months, and were separated still further by their mutual hatred, which constantly widened the gulf between them, as the tide rushing restlessly between two shores that can never touch each other, invades and sunders them more and more. Jack loved his mother too well to cherish hatred against herself because she had a lover, but as his love for Cécile had taught him dignity, he hated his mother's lover and held him responsible for the fault of this weak woman, riveted to her chain by violence and tyranny, by all that would have estranged a proud and independent nature. Charlotte, ever apprehensive of scenes and explanations, had abandoned all efforts at reconciling these two men. She never spoke now to d'Argenton of her son, and her meetings with him were in secret.

On several occasions, she had even come veiled and in a cab to the shop in the Rue Oberkampf, to ask for Jack, whom his comrades could see standing at the door of her carriage, talking to a woman still young in appearance, and elegantly if a trifle showily dressed. The story spread among them that he had a mistress and a smart one, too! They complimented him, and actually believed that this was one of those strange

but not infrequent liaisons by means of which certain rolling-stones, starting out in some suburb, return, after they have become rich and well-established in life, to their native gutter. The first meeting was in some dance-hall perhaps, where Madame had gone for a lark, or on some public driveway crossing one of the poorer quarters. These workmen specially favored are better dressed than their comrades, and they wear the foppish, disdainful, and distant air of men upon whom queens have bestowed their favors.

For Jack these suspicions contained a twofold insult, and without repeating them to Charlotte, he tried to prevent her coming by giving her to understand that the rules of the shop forbade his leaving the place during working-hours. After that, they saw each other at rare intervals, sometimes in public gardens, but oftener in churches, for, like all of her kind, she was becoming devout as she grew older, partly through an overflow of sentimentality that found no other outlet for its activity, and also because of her love for pomp and ceremony, and a craving to gratify that last vanity of a pretty woman by kneeling upon a *prie-Dieu*, in front of the choir, on sermon-days. During their rare and brief interviews, Charlotte, as usual, talked incessantly, though there was something of sadness and weariness in her manner. But she professed to be perfectly at ease, very happy, and full of confidence in Monsieur d'Argenton's literary future. One day, however, after one of these conversations, as they were leaving the Pan-

théon, she said, with a somewhat embarrassed air:

"Jack, could you — Just imagine! I don't know how I managed it, but I have not money enough to last me to the end of the month. I do not dare to ask him for any, for his affairs are going so badly! Poor darling, he is really quite ill from it all! Could you loan me, just for a few days — "

He did not allow her to end the sentence. He had just received his pay, and put it in his mother's hands, coloring as he did so. Then, in the brighter light of the street, he noticed what had escaped him in the dim church, the traces of despair upon that smiling face, its pallor mottled with red, in which all the freshness seemed to have faded, diluted in rivulets of tears. Deep pity seized him.

"You know, mother, if you are unhappy, you have me. Come to me. I should be so proud, so pleased to have you with me!"

She trembled.

"No, no, it is impossible," she answered in a low voice. "He has had so much to try him of late. It would be unworthy."

And she hurried away from him, as if fearing to yield to some temptation.

V.

JACK GOES TO HOUSEKEEPING.

A SUMMER morning at Ménilmontant, in the little lodging, Rue de Panoyaux. The peddler and his mate have risen some time ago, though it is not yet day. The former hobbles back and forth, making as little noise as possible, while he puts to rights, sweeps, and blacks the boots; it is marvellous to see that awkward-looking fellow's nimbleness and dexterity, his care not to disturb his brave companion seated before the open window, under a June sky of tender blue, tinged with the dawn's rosy rays, against which are outlined the thousand chimneys that rise above this courtyard of the suburbs. When Jack's eyes stray from his book he sees in front of him the zinc roof of an immense metal factory. A little later, when the sun beats upon it, this roof will become a terrible mirror, sending forth insupportable reverberations. But now the first daylight is reflected in soft, vague tints, and the tall chimney that rises from the middle of the building, strengthened by long metal ropes that connect it with the neighboring roofs seems like the mast of some ship sailing over the heavy and shining waters. Below, cocks are crowing in the poultry-houses for which the subur-

ban tradesmen are sure to make room in the corner of some shed or garden. Suddenly a call re-echoes:

"Ma'me Jacob, Ma'me Mathieu, here is the bread!"

It is Jack's neighbor beginning her rounds. Her apron full of loaves of various sizes, fragrant, and still warm from the oven, she passes along the corridors, the stairs, and places the bread upright in the angles where milk-cans are hanging, calling her customers by name, and serving as an alarm clock for them, as she is always the first one up in the neighborhood.

"Here is the bread!"

It is the call of life, an eloquent and irresistible appeal. It is the daily comforter, that bread so terribly hard to earn, and it makes the household glad, the table bright. There must be some for the father's knapsack, for the school-boy's little lunch-basket, for the morning breakfast, and for the evening soup.

"Here is the bread! Here is the bread!"

The bread-carrier's knife cuts the wooden tallies with a shrill grating sound. Another notch, another debt, hours of labor pledged before they are ended. But no matter. To no other moment in the whole day belongs a sensation like this. It is the awakening of life with its animal instinct, its immediate appetite, the mouth opening as soon as the eyes. And at Madame Weber's call, ascending or descending the staircase, and followed upon every story, the whole house awakes; doors are

slammed, the children set up triumphant shouts; their footsteps echo through the house as they scamper down the stairs and return again, carrying loaves bigger than themselves in their arms; and when you notice that movement so common to poor people coming from the baker's, the miser's gesture as he hugs his casket closer, you understand what an important factor bread is in their lives.

Soon every one is up, and about. Opposite Jack, on the other side of the factory, windows are opening, innumerable windows, the same that are lighted at night. By daylight they reveal the mystery of their laborious poverty. At one a sad-eyed woman has seated herself, and is running a sewing-machine, aided by her little girl who hands her, one by one, various pieces of material. At another window, a young girl, already dressed, some shop-girl perhaps, leans out to cut the bread for her meagre meal, fearing lest she should drop any of the crumbs upon the floor of her room, swept that morning. At a little distance is a mansard window with a small mirror hanging from it; as soon as the sun has risen, a red curtain is pulled across it to protect it from the burning reflection of the zinc roof. All these humble lodgings open on the back of an enormous house, furnished with winding stairways; here the house-slops are emptied; cracks and chimney-pipes disfigure the building; its whole aspect is dingy and squalid. The student is not downcast at sight of it, but he is always moved at the voice of a certain old woman who every day, and invariably in the

same tone utters to the morning air, before the din of the street begins, a sentence that never varies, and is as pathetic as a lament: "People that live in the country in such weather as this ought to be very happy indeed!" To whom is she talking, this poor old creature? To no one or to every one, perhaps to herself, perhaps to the canary-bird whose cage, decked with some fresh sprigs of green, she fastens to her shutter; perhaps to the row of flower-pots in her window. Jack is quite of her way of thinking, and would willingly take up that mournful refrain of hers, for his first thought, brave and tender, flew always towards a peaceful village street, towards a little green door on whose plate are inscribed the words: "Doctor's bell." And as he sits dreaming, forgetting for a moment his arduous task, the rustle of a silk gown is heard in the corridor, and the key turns in the lock.

"Turn it to your right," calls Bélisaire, who is making the coffee.

The key turns to the left.

"To the right, I say."

The key turns more and more to the left. The peddler grows impatient; coffee-pot in hand, he opens the door, and Charlotte rushes into the room. Bélisaire, amazed at this invasion of flounces, feathers, and laces, bows to the ground, jumps about on his awkward legs, and polishes the floor vigorously. Jack's mother, failing to recognize the hairy, unkempt individual before her, makes her excuses, and withdraws towards the door.

"Pardon, monsieur, I have made a mistake."

At the sound of that voice Jack raises his head and springs up.

"Oh no, mamma, you have not made a mistake."

"Oh my Jack, my Jack!"

She throws herself upon his neck, and takes refuge in his arms.

"Save me, Jack, protect me. That man, that wretch to whom I have given everything, sacrificed everything, my own life and my child's, he has beaten me, yes, he has just beaten me! This morning when he came home after two nights spent away from it, I tried to make a few remarks. I had some right to do so, I think. Then the wretch flew into a frightful rage and raised his hand against me, against me, against m—"

The end of the sentence was lost in a torrent of tears and wild sobs. At the unhappy woman's first words, Bélisaire had discreetly retired, closing the door upon this domestic scene. Jack, standing in front of his mother, gazed at her, full of consternation and compassion. How changed, how pale she was! In the fresh daylight, in the early sunshine that flooded the little room, the marks of time appeared more deeply furrowed upon her cheeks than he had ever noted before, and a few gray hairs she had not attempted to conceal glistened upon her temples. Without thinking of wiping her tears, she talked on very volubly, relating all her grievances against the man whom she had just left, speaking at random and incoherently, for they rushed to her lips so fast that she stammered.

"Oh, how I have suffered, my Jack, this last ten years! How he has wounded, tortured me. He is a monster, I tell you. He spends his time in cafés, in public-houses where there are women. That is where they write their journal now! And fine work they are making of it! The last number was perfectly flat! Do you know, when he went to Indret, to carry the money, I was there too, in the next village, and wanted so much to see you, you may believe. But this gentleman would not let me. Was n't that detestable? He hates you so, would do anything to harm you, because he knows you can do without him. That is what he can never forgive you. And he has even reproached us both many a time because you have eaten his bread. He is so niggardly. Do you wish to know another thing he did to you? I never meant to tell you, but to-day my tongue is unloosed. Well! I had ten thousand francs for you that *Bon ami* had given me at the time of that affair at Indret. Oh, I know he thought they would draw big interest, but they are sunk, with so many others, and when I asked him whether he would not account to you for them, for in your position this money would be very useful, can you guess what he did? He drew up a long list of all he had spent upon you in times past, for your keeping and food, at Étiolles and at the Roudics'. It amounted to fifteen thousand francs, but he said he would not insist upon further return. Generous, was he not? But I have endured everything, his injustice, his cruelty, his

rages, on your account, the outrageous fashion in which he talked to his friends of that Indret affair, as if your innocence had not been recognized and proclaimed. Yes, I endured even that, for nothing they said could really hinder me from loving you and thinking of you a hundred times a day. But to leave me two nights running, in all the agony of suspense and jealousy, preferring some theatrical woman, some lost creature of the Faubourg Saint-Germain (for it seems they run madly after him, all these countesses), and then to receive my reproaches with disdainful shrugs of the shoulders, and, in a fit of rage, dare to strike me, me, Ida de Barancy! It was too much for my pride, my self-respect. I dressed myself, and put on my bonnet. Then I went straight up to him, and said, 'Now look well at me, monsieur d'Argenton, for you see me for the last time in your life. I leave you forever. I am going to my child. I hope you will find another Charlotte; but as for me, I have had enough of it.' Then I left, and here I am."

Jack had listened to the end without interrupting her, growing paler and paler at each revelation of infamy, all she related filling him with such shame for herself, that he dared not look at her. When she had ended, he took her hand, and with mingled gentleness, tenderness, and gravity, said: "I thank you, mother, for having come to me. One thing only was lacking to complete the dignity of my life; I needed you. And now you are here. I have you with me, and shall not let you go;

that was my dearest desire. But take care, I shall not let you leave me."

"I leave you? Return to that man! Never, my Jack! with you, and you always! Only we two. You remember, I told you that a day might come when I should need you. It has come, that day, I assure you!"

Her son's kisses calmed her excitement by degrees, and it gave way to great sighs, like a child's grief that has worn itself out in tears. "You shall see, my Jack, what a delightful life we shall lead together. I owe you a large debt of love and tenderness. I shall pay those long arrears, have no fear. You cannot think how free I feel. I breathe again! You know, this room of yours is small and bare and hideous, a perfect dog-kennel. Well, since I have been in it, it seems to me I have entered Paradise."

This somewhat slighting appreciation of the lodging that seemed magnificent to Bélisaire and himself, made Jack a trifle uneasy for the future. In half an hour he must go to his work, and so much had to be decided, so many arrangements made, that he hardly knew where to begin. First of all, there was the peddler to be consulted; he found him patiently pacing the corridor, as he would have continued to do until evening, without once knocking to see whether the explanation was ended.

"What do you think has happened, Bélisaire? My mother has come to live with me. How are we going to arrange about it?"

Bélisaire trembled at the thought that suddenly occurred to him: "He cannot be my mate any longer. The wedding will have to be put off again." But he did not permit his embarrassment to be seen, and bethought himself only to rescue his friend from his difficulty. It was agreed that as their lodging was the best one on that story, Jack should occupy it with his mother, the peddler would store his caps and hats at Madame Weber's, and look for a small room for himself elsewhere.

"It does n't matter at all, not at all," said the poor fellow, trying to assume the air of one who is not at all concerned. They entered the room, and Jack presented his friend Bélisaire to his mother.

The peddler remembered quite well the beautiful lady of Les Aulnettes, and placed himself at the disposal of Ida de Barancy in getting to rights, for Charlotte was now a name of the past. A bed, two chairs, and a washstand must be hired. Jack took from the drawer in which he kept his savings three or four louis, and gave them to his mother.

"You know, mamma, if cooking bothers you, Madame Weber will get the dinner when she returns."

"No, indeed, that is my work, if Monsieur Bélisaire will only show me the shops. I wish to keep house for you, and not to upset or spoil any of your arrangements. You shall see what a fine little dinner I shall get for you, since you are too far from the workshop to return to lunch. Everything will be ready for you on your return."

She had already removed her shawl, turned up her sleeves and her long skirts, ready for work. Jack was delighted to see her so resolute, kissed her with all his heart, and set off for work, happier than he had ever been in his lifetime before. How courageously he worked that day, as he thought of the manifold duties he had taken upon himself. His mother's painful position had frequently occupied his thoughts since the idea of his marriage had become a settled one. This one thought had marred his joy and his hopes. To what depths would that man compel her to descend? What fate hung over her? And at times he felt a sense of shame at the thought of giving as a mother-in-law to his dear Cécile this outcast, for whom any other than her son would doubtless feel only contempt. But now all this was to be changed. His Ida, henceforth redeemed, protected by the most watchful, the tenderest love, would be worthy of her whom she would one day call "my daughter." It seemed to Jack as if this one event in itself lessened the distance between his betrothed and himself, and he handled the heavy press of the Eyssendeck factory with such energy that his comrades noticed it.

"Look at the Aristo up there! How happy he seems! Matters are progressing with your sweetheart, eh, Aristo?"

"Indeed they are," Jack answered with a laugh.

He laughed again and again that day. But after his work was done, and he returned homeward, up the Rue Oberkampf, a sudden fear

seized him. Would he find again in his room her who had burst upon him so suddenly? He knew with what promptitude every caprice of Ida's found itself wings; and then that ignoble passion that bound this weak creature to her slavery caused him to fear that she might have felt the temptation of renewing it, now it was broken, too strong for her. And he strode hastily over the distance, but once upon the staircase, his fear ceased. Among all the harsh sounds of this working man's tenement, rose a fresh voice, executing brilliant roulades, notes long-drawn-out, like the music of a captive goldfinch in a new cage. Jack knew that resonant voice well.

At the first step he took into the "dog kennel" he paused in amazement.

Cleaned from one end to the other, rid of Bélisaire's cargo, and ornamented by a fine bedstead and washstand hired by Ida, the room appeared transformed, and larger. Big nosegays, purchased from handcarts in the street were in every receptacle that could be found to hold them, and the table, already laid, looked quite festive with its white cloth and common crockery, a fine pie, and two bottles of excellent wine. Ida too, looked different, in an embroidered petticoat, a light dressing-sack, a little cap set upon her fluffy hair, and the radiant physiognomy of a pretty woman, consoled, rested, and happy.

"Well, what do you say to that?" she asked, running towards him with open arms.

He kissed her.

"It is splendid!"

"Don't you think I have been quick in arranging things? But I must let you know that Bel helped me. What an obliging fellow!"

"Who is that? Bélisaire?"

"Why, of course, my little Bel, and Madame Weber helped too."

"Oh, I see you have made friends already."

"I should say so. They are so kind, so thoughtful! I have invited them to dine with us."

"The deuce you have! And where will you find plates?"

"Why, you see, I bought a few, just a few. And the people next to us lent me some spoons and forks. They are very obliging too, those Levindrés."

Jack, who was not acquainted with these obliging neighbors of his, opened his eyes widely.

"But that is n't all, my Jack. You must look at this pie! I went as far as the Place de la Bourse to find it. I know a place there where they sell them fifteen sous cheaper than anywhere else. But it is such a walk, I was so tired that I had to take a cab, coming back."

That was herself with a vengeance. Two francs squandered upon a cab that she might save fifteen sous! And it was plain to be seen, she knew where the best of everything was to be found. The rolls had come from the Viennese bakery, the coffee and dessert from the Palais Royal.

Jack listened, quite stupefied.

She perceived his amazement, and asked naïvely:

"I have spent a little too much, perhaps. Have n't I?"

"No, but —"

"Oh yes, I see I have, by your manner. But how could I help it? There were so many things needed here, and besides we do not meet again every day. But you shall see whether I mean to be economical or not, after this."

And she drew from the drawer a long green book, and flourished it triumphantly in the air.

"Look at this fine account-book I bought at Madame Lévêque's."

"Lévêque, Levindré! Why, you seem to know the whole neighborhood!"

"Why, of course! Lévêque's is the stationery store next door. She is a nice old lady, and she keeps a circulating library, too. It is very convenient, for, after all, we must keep in touch with the literary movement. Meanwhile, I have bought an account-book. It was really indispensable, don't you see that, my dear boy? Impossible to keep house systematically without it. This evening, after dinner, we will make out our little accounts, if you wish. You will see that everything is set down."

"Oh, very well. If everything is set down" — They were interrupted by the arrival of Bélisaire, Madame Weber, and the boy with the big head. Nothing could have been more comical than the familiar and patronizing air with which Ida de Barancy talked to her new friends.

"I say, my dear Bel, not meaning, of course,

to give you orders — Madame Weber, close the door; the child is sneezing."

And such magnificent manners, such amiable and royal dignity, such a condescending fashion of setting these people quite at their ease. And Madame Weber was perfectly at ease, following her small business with a clear conscience, aided by a pair of sturdy arms. And the little Weber showed not the least reluctance in cramming himself with pie-crust; Bélisaire only seemed out of sorts, and he had good reason to be. Had he not believed himself within a fortnight of the blissful day, his felicity just within reach; and now he saw it disappearing in the uncertainty of the future. It was terrible. From time to time he cast a mournful glance towards Madame Weber, who seemed to sustain the loss of their mate quite composedly, or glanced towards Jack, who was carried away with delight, and attending to every want of his mother with lover-like solicitude. Ah! well might it be said that human events are like those see-saws children make of a piece of board, which raise up one of their number only to let the others feel all the hardness and roughness of the earth under foot. Jack was soaring towards the light, while his poor comrade was descending from all his dreams into the depths of harsh reality. For, in the first place, he who had enjoyed his room so much, taken such pride in it, must henceforth occupy a sort of wood-closet with a transom opening upon the stairway, and no other means of ventilation.

There was not another corner to be had upon that story, and not for worlds would Bélisaire lengthen the distance between himself and Madame Weber, even by so much as a flight of stairs. This creature answered to the name of Bélisaire, but ought really to have been called Resignation, Kindness, Devotion, Patience. He deserved all these and many more names as noble, which he never claimed, nor boasted of, though those who lived with him discovered his right to them by degrees.

After their guests were gone, and Jack and his mother were left alone, she was much surprised to see him make haste to clear the table, bring out some big school-books, and place them upon it.

"What are you going to do?"

"To study, as you see."

"What for?"

"To be sure, you have not heard about that." Then he opened his heart and told her its secret, spoke to her of the twofold purpose of his life, and the bright hope that bounded it. Until now he had told her nothing of all this. He had understood too well that giddy brain of hers, full of gaps and blanks, to confide to her his dream of happiness. He feared too much the revelations she certainly would have made to d'Argenton, and the thought that his dream of love might be discussed in that house where he had met only enmity, was revolting and dreadful to him. He mistrusted the poet and his friends, and would have felt his happiness endangered at their hands.

But now that his mother had returned to him, and was free again, and all his own, he could give himself the supreme delight of talking to her about Cécile. Jack told the tale of his love with all the enthusiasm, all the ardor so beautiful in a youth of twenty, with a sincerity of speech which was eloquent, with a maturity of feeling born of his long years of suffering. But, alas! his mother could not understand him. All there was of seriousness, of true greatness in the affection of this youth robbed of his birthright, quite escaped her. Although she was extremely sentimental, love did not have for her the same significance it possessed for him. She was moved at his story; as moved as she would have been by a third act at the Gymnase — at sight of an *ingénue* in a white robe and pink ribbons, listening to the declaration of a lover faultlessly attired in a loose jacket, and fresh from the curling-tongs. She was perfectly enchanted with it all, and leaned forward to listen, her hands upraised, amused and charmed by this artless passion that moved her to smile. "Oh, how lovely, how lovely it is!" she repeated. "What darlings you are! It quite reminds one of Paul and Virginia!" But what impressed her most was the startling, complicated, abnormal part of Cécile's history. She interrupted Jack again and again with "Do you know? this is really a romance! A genuine romance! Why! it would make a splendid plot for a play!" "A splendid plot," — this one of the innumerable phrases she had absorbed from

having lived in the "literary atmosphere." But lovers talking of their passion are blissfully oblivious to all that is said in reply, save as an echo of their own thought. Jack rejoiced in his own happy recollections, past apprehensions, projects and dreams, without even hearing his mother's absurd interruptions, or perceiving that upon her his story left, after all, a very every-day impression, like the refrain of some love-ditty, and that she really pitied just a little the naïve folly and innocence of the two youthful lovers.

VI.

BÉLISAIRE'S WEDDING.

JACK had been housekeeping scarcely a week when, one evening, on leaving the works, he found Bélisaire waiting for him, from ear to ear one broad smile.

"I am very happy, Jack. We have a mate at last. Madame Weber has seen him, and he suits her. Everything is settled. We are going to be married."

It was none too soon. The unhappy man was actually pining away, growing thin as he saw the summer advancing, and knew that with the arrival of chimney-sweeps and chestnut-venders his happiness would be still further postponed; with this peddler the different seasons were personified by these street-nomads, just as they are announced to country-folk by the various birds of passage. Too submissive to his destiny to complain, he uttered his cry of "Hats, hats, hats!" with a sadness that might have moved one almost to tears. From such sadness as his must surely spring that note of melancholy that on certain days is heard in these cries of Paris, the common and trivial words seeming to express all the restlessness, the distress of the lives these people

lead. The tone only has a meaning, for the words, the cries themselves are always the same. But think how many ways there are of calling "Old clothes!" and how little the sturdy morning call resembles the weary, voiceless, disheartened call which the street-vender utters quite mechanically as he returns to his domicile. Jack, who had been the involuntary cause of his friend's disappointment, was as delighted as himself at the good news he had just heard.

"Good enough! I would like to see this mate of yours myself."

"There he is," said Bélisaire, pointing to a big fellow a few steps behind him, clad in working-clothes, in his shirt-sleeves, a hammer upon his shoulder, a leather apron rolled up under his arm. The face, which was remarkable only for the insignificance of its features, wore a sleepy look, and was inflamed from too frequent interviews with the bottle; it was half concealed by a thick beard, — the rough, dirty, discolored beard of the sometime comrade of the Gymnase Moronval, the character referred to by the Failures as "the man who has read Proudhon." If anything may be judged of the moral make-up by the physical appearance, Bélisaire's new comrade, whose name was Ribarot, was not a bad man, merely a lounger, solemn, pretentious, ignorant, and drunken. Jack carefully refrained from imparting to the peddler the unfavorable impression he had formed of the man, for Bélisaire contemplated his latest acquisition with delight, lavishing hearty handshakes

upon him, not stopping to ask himself why. And since Madame Weber had given her approval, what more could be asked? To be sure, the worthy woman had felt about it much as Jack did. Seeing that her sighing wooer was so happy she had not dared to be too hard to please, and overlooking the unprepossessing exterior, she had expressed herself satisfied with the new mate, for want of a better. During the fortnight preceding the wedding, what joyous cries of "Hats to sell!" resounded through the working men's courts at Ménilmontant, Belleville, and Villette! The call was light-hearted, sonorous, as the triumphant and clarion note of Chanticleer, sounding like the antique "Hymen! ô Hyménée," translated into the language of the unlettered. At last the glorious day, the famous day arrived. In spite of all Madame Weber could say, Bélisaire had decided to do things in great shape; the steel rings on his long woollen purse slid back as far as they could, and the result was magnificent! Such a wedding it was!

Among the more prosperous of the middle class one day is taken for the civil marriage, and another for the church-wedding; but people in humbler circumstances, who have no time to lose, combine these ceremonies, and one day does service for both; nearly always Saturday is chosen for this long and tiresome affair, as Sunday is a good day to rest. The suburban Mairies upon that day dedicated to Hymen are a sight not to be forgotten. From early morning vans and

four-wheel cabs stop at the doors, and the dusty passages are filled with processions of greater or less length, waiting for hours in the great public hall. The wedding parties mingle, the groomsmen become acquainted, take a drop for their stomachs' sakes, the brides inspect, stare each other out of countenance, picking each other to pieces, while the relatives, having nothing to do during this long wait, talk among themselves in an undertone, for, despite its ugliness, the bareness of its walls, the commonplace character of its placards, the municipal building impresses these poor people. The shabby velvet of the benches, the height of the rooms, the usher with his chain, the solemn deputy-mayor, — all these amuse and impress them. The law seems to them like some great unknown, some stately invisible dame whose drawing-room reception they are attending. I must say that among the innumerable processions that crossed the little courtyard of the *Ménilmonte* Mairie that blissful Saturday morning, Bélisaire's wedding-party was among the most conspicuous, though it lacked that white bridal-robe which sends all the women to the windows, and sets all the idlers of the street in a flutter of excitement. Madame Weber, being a widow, wore a gown of the most startling blue, — that crude indigo dear to those who love solid, substantial things; a flowered shawl was folded upon her arm, and a gorgeous cap decked with flowers and ribbons, fluttered above her shining, well-washed Auvergnat countenance.

She walked at the side of Father Bélisaire, a little yellow old man with a hooked nose, very quick in his movements, and subject to incessant fits of coughing which his new daughter-in-law made every effort to relieve by vigorously administered poundings upon his back. This constant friction sadly interfered with the dignity of the wedding march, interrupted at every moment, while all the couples crowded together, waiting for the attack to cease.

Bélisaire followed the first pair, giving his arm to his sister, the widow from Nantes, a sly-looking woman, with hair that curled very tightly, and a hooked nose like her father's. As for Bélisaire, his customers who saw him oftenest would not have recognized him. That furrow with which intense pain had marked his cheeks on each side was gone; the big, blue, swollen vein in the middle of his forehead, that mouth always open, and seeming to say "Oh, dear!" without speaking it, these were things of the past; walking with his head upraised, he was almost good-looking, and he proudly exhibited, one foot in advance of the other, a pair of enormous, highly polished pumps, made specially to order for himself, and so large, so long, that they gave him the appearance of an inhabitant of the Zuyder-Zee, shod in snow-shoes. But no matter! Bélisaire suffered no longer, and his was the illusive happiness of owning a perfectly new pair of shoes; a twofold sense of felicity made his visage radiant. He held Madame Weber's child by the

hand, its huge head appearing still more enormous, having been frizzed for the occasion in that extravagant fashion of which the hairdressers of the suburbs have the secret. The mate, who after much urging had consented to lay aside his hammer and his leathern apron for a single day, the baker, Madame Weber's employer, and his son-in-law, both of them remarkable for an enormous red wad of robust neck that protruded between their closely-cut hair and the cloth of their coat-collars, presented a succession of grotesque frock-coats which still preserved all the wrinkles they had acquired in the closet from which they came forth but seldom, and their stiff sleeves scarcely outlined the elbows they covered. Next came the Levindré household, followed by Bélisaire's brothers and sisters, neighbors, friends, and, last of all, Jack, but without his mother, Madame de Barancy having consented to honor the repast with her presence, but unwilling to follow in the wedding procession all day long.

After the crowd at the Mairie, the interminable waiting, accompanied by gnawings of hunger, for it was long past noon, the *cortège* set out for the railway-station, intending to take the train for Vincennes. The repast, which was to be breakfast and dinner in one, was to take place at Saint Mandé, Avenue du Bel-Air, in a restaurant whose address had been scribbled for Bélisaire on a scrap of paper which he had tucked away in the bottom of his pocket. Not an unnecessary pre-

caution, for, at the rondpoint near the entrance to the woods, four or five establishments, exactly alike, presented themselves, each bearing the same sign, — "WEDDINGS AND BANQUETS," — repeated upon the chalets and kiosks, temptingly decorated with green. When Bélisaire's party arrived, the room they were to have had not been vacated, and while they were waiting they strolled around the Lake of Vincennes, that neighborhood which is the poor man's Bois de Boulogne. Wedding parties that had satisfied their hunger, others just started upon open-air revels, were scattered over the green, with a sprinkling of white dresses, black coats and uniforms, for a festive occasion of this sort is never without some school-boy or a soldier in uniform, regimentals of some sort. These various groups were laughing, singing, fooling, cramming themselves in the midst of shouting and running, dancing of quadrilles and round dances to the music of hand-organs. Men and women had exchanged hats; behind the hedges some were playing blind man's buff in their shirt-sleeves, couples were kissing each other, or a flounce of some bride's dress was ripped, and her bridesmaid stopped to fasten it. Oh! those white dresses, dingy with the bluish tint of the starch that stiffens them — with what delight these poor girls trail them over the green, fancying that for one day, at least, in their lives they are elegant ladies! For, whatever their pleasures may be, the poor always strive to find in them the illusion

of riches, to exchange their social condition for that of earth's envied and favored ones!

The peddler and his party wandered mournfully through the dust and noise of this hymeneal kirmess, and crammed themselves with cakes and crackers while awaiting the longed-for feast. Certainly the elements of gayety were not wanting among them, as they were soon to discover for themselves, but at the present moment hunger paralyzed their spirits. At last one of the Bélisaire tribe, sent ahead as a scout, returned to announce that all was ready for them, that they had only to seat themselves at table, and they hastened towards the restaurant.

The table was spread in a big room, divided from others just like it by a movable partition, and was painted in dingy colors, decorated by gildings and mirrors that were all exactly alike. Everything going on in one room could be heard in the next, — laughter and clinking of glasses, calls to the waiters, and even the impatient ring of the bells. The warm, steamy atmosphere within the little garden, beneath the window, with its oblique rows of trees, might have led one to fancy that he was in some big bathing-establishment. Here, as at the Mairie, the guests were seized with a species of awe at sight of the long table already spread, decked at each end by a bunch of artificial orange blossoms, and impossible-looking monumental pieces of pastry, adorned with ornaments of pink and green sugar; these marvels had been immovable for ages, having

been prepared permanently for wedding-feasts, and they were spotted by generations of flies who would alight upon them in spite of repeated slaps of the waiters' napkins. While awaiting Madame de Barancy, who had not yet arrived, the guests took their places. The bridegroom wished to sit beside his wife, but the sister from Nantes informed them that nobody did that now; that it was not proper, and that they ought to sit opposite each other. This was finally done after a long debate, during which old Bélisaire turned towards his new daughter-in-law, and asked her in a very disagreeable tone:

"I say! You! How ought it to be done? How did you arrange it with Monsieur Weber?"

To which the bread-carrier replied with great composure that she had been married in her own land, on a farm, and that she had even waited upon the table on that occasion. The old man's malicious thrust missed its aim, but it was evident to all that the Bélisaires were dissatisfied, and that all the splendors of the dinner could not restore their serenity. By the marriage of the eldest son, their milch-cow would be drained dry, and all their little profits would take wing.

At first every one ate in silence, partly because they were ravenously hungry, but also owing to the fact that they were greatly intimidated by the presence of the black-coated gentlemen who waited upon them and whom Bélisaire vainly endeavored to thaw by his most amiable smile. Singular types, these suburban waiters, faded,

withered, impudent, their close-shaven chins and big side-whiskers leaving the mouth plainly to be seen, with its severe, ironic, official expression. They might have been mistaken for destitute prefects, reduced to this humiliating position. But the comical part of it was the disdainful air with which they regarded all these poor wretches of limited means, — the guests of a wedding-banquet furnished at a hundred sous a head. That enormous sum of one hundred sous was repeated admiringly by each of the guests, for this Bélisaire, able to spend one hundred francs at one sitting, upon a wedding breakfast, was invested in their eyes with a halo of luxury; but the waiters felt a profound contempt, indicated among themselves by frequent winkings and an air of impassible gravity towards the guests. One of these gentlemen stationed himself at Bélisaire's side, annoying, oppressing, and overawing him; another, standing just opposite, behind his wife's chair, stared so unpleasantly at the poor peddler, that to escape this surveillance he took up the menu placed at his left, and did nothing but read and reread it. That menu dazzled them all! Among certain familiar words, easily recognized, such as *ducks*, *turnips*, *fillet of beef*, *haricots* of various kinds, weird and imposing epithets stared them in the face, names of towns, of generals, of famous battles — *Marengo*, *Richelieu*, *Chateaubriand*, *Barigoule* — confronting which Bélisaire was as astounded as were all the guests. And they were actually going to eat all these things!

Picture to yourself the expression on the faces of these unfortunates when two plates of soup were presented, with the query, "Bisque or purée Crécy?"—when they were offered two Spanish wines to choose from, with the question, "Xérès or Pacaret?" It was like one of those parlor-games where you are asked to choose between the names of two flowers, to one of which some mysterious forfeit is attached. How decide an affair so momentous? Each hesitated, and then ventured on one of the two, haphazard. It really mattered very little which they chose, for both plates contained an insipid, warm, watery liquid, and the liquid in each bottle was precisely the same,—a yellowish, turbid, dilute fluid that reminded Jack of the *églantine* served in the Gymnase Moronval. The guests cast startled looks at each other, neighbor watching neighbor, to see how he would dispose of it, and tried to discover which of their variously shaped glasses they should offer to the waiter. The mate avoided this difficulty by drinking everything out of the same glass, and that the largest. But all these anxieties and annoyances were a wet blanket upon the beginning of this delusive repast. The bride was the first to rise superior to the absurd situation. This excellent woman, whose good common sense speedily enlightened her, reassured herself by addressing her child.

"Eat all you can, darling," she said; "don't be afraid to eat anything you see; it costs us enough, and we might as well have the good of it."

The deep sagacity of this remark produced its effect upon the assembled guests; soon every jaw was moving with a formidable noise, laughter spread around the board, and the bread-basket was in great demand. But the Bélisaire clan were out of harmony with the general gayety; the younger members of it whispered among themselves, with many a sly sneer; the old man talked very loudly, in a gruff and surly tone, with frequent outbursts of ironic laughter, directed towards his son, who, notwithstanding, treated him with great respect, asking his wife, across the table, to "see to father's plate," or to "father's glass." At sight of all these frightful, rapacious, blinking Bélisaires one wondered how Madame Bélisaire had been able to free her poor peddler from their greedy clutches; it had required all the magic of love to accomplish a revolution like this, but it had been accomplished, and the worthy woman felt herself quite capable of assuming this responsibility for the future and equal to the task of contending with all their antipathies, animosities, and malicious allusions, which even now were lying in wait for her, but did not for a moment hinder her broad face from smiling, as she filled her boy's plate again, bidding him "Eat all you can; don't be afraid, darling!" The banquet was beginning to grow animated when the rustle of silks was heard, and the door opened wide to admit Ida de Barancy; she was in haste, but charming and radiant.

"I must really beg your pardon, good people,

but I had a cab that crawled; and it is such a distance! I thought I should never get here."

She had donned her best gown, delighted to have an opportunity of appearing in a fashionable toilette, for such occasions had been lacking since she had lived with her son. She certainly produced an extraordinary effect. The manner in which she seated herself beside Bélisaire, placing her gloves in her glass, and motioning one of the waiters to bring her the menu, filled the entire party with admiration. It was fine to see how she ordered those imposing and disdainful waiters about — one of them, the very one that had frightened Bélisaire, she remembered having seen in a boulevard-restaurant, where she had supped sometimes with d'Argenton after the theatre.

"So you are here now, are you? Come, what are you going to give me?"

She laughed aloud, raising the bare arms, her open sleeve revealed to make her hands appear still whiter, shook her bracelets, surveyed herself in the glass opposite her, and with her finger tips tossed a good-morning to her son. Then she asked for a footstool, for ice and seltzer water with the air of one thoroughly familiar with the resources of the restaurant. Whenever she spoke, profound silence reigned about the table — like the silence that marked the beginning of the repast. With the exception of the young Bélisaires, who were quite absorbed in the contemplation of Ida's bracelets, that their glistening eyes

assayed like touchstones,—all were again affected, as they had been by the waiters; they felt too embarrassed to speak or move. Neither did Jack feel disposed to make the feast more animated. All these marriage-ceremonies had set him dreaming of love, of the future, and he felt but slightly interested in what surrounded him.

"Well, upon my word, you are not very lively!" Ida de Barancy suddenly exclaimed, when she had sufficiently enjoyed the conquest she had made so easily. "Come, my good Bel, a little more dash, more spirits, in Heaven's name! But first, wait a minute."

She rose, took her plate in one hand, her glass in the other. "I beg to change place with Madame Bélisaire. I am sure her husband will not complain."

This was said with such grace and condescension, the proposition filled Bélisaire with so much delight, the small Weber let out such piercing yells when his mother lifted him from the chair he had occupied, that the constraint which weighed upon all the guests, not at all lessened by the noise of their forks, was scattered at once and for the rest of the day, and the banquet became a real wedding-feast. Every one ate, or imagined that he did. The waiters went around the table again and again, executing marvels of prestidigitation, serving twenty persons from a single duck, a single chicken, cut so skilfully, that every one had some of it, and might have asked even for more. And the green peas *à*

l'anglaise, falling like hail upon the plates! And the haricots, also *à l'anglaise*, prepared at a corner of the table with salt, pepper, a little butter (such butter!) — the whole amalgamated by a waiter who smiled viciously as he stirred the nauseous mixture. But the great moment came with the arrival of the champagne. Except Ida de Barancy, who had drunk considerable quantities of it in her lifetime, the others knew nothing more of this magic wine than its name, and the word "champagne" signified to them wealth, boudoirs, junketings of all sorts. They spoke in undertones to one another, watched for it eagerly. At length at dessert, a waiter appeared, bringing a bottle with a silver cap, which he proceeded to remove with pincers. At the gesture of stopping her ears, made by the nervous Ida, who never lost an opportunity of posing, or producing an effect, of doing anything that might call attention to her graces, all the other women prepared for a formidable report. But there was nothing of the sort. The cork came out quite naturally without an explosion, just like any other cork, and the waiter, elevating the bottle, rushed around the table, saying very rapidly, "Champagne, champagne, champagne!" Glasses were held out to him, as he passed, and this time the feat was performed with an inexhaustible bottle. There was froth enough for twenty persons, a sharp sparkle at the bottom of the glass, sipped by every one with great respect. And after every one had been served some must have re-

mained in the bottle, for Jack, who sat facing the door, saw the waiter drain it down his own throat as he went out. But such is the magic of that word "champagne," so much of French gayety there is in the least drop of its foam, that from the moment of its appearance a singular animation stirred the guests. With the Bélisaires this betrayed itself by an extraordinary rapacity. They made a clean sweep of the table-cloth, stuffing everything they could find into their pockets, — oranges, sweetmeats, rancid cakes, observing that it was better to carry them away than to leave them for the waiters. Suddenly, in the midst of much whispering and giggling, some one passed Madame Bélisaire a plate of deceptive bonbons, adorned by a little pink and blue sugar baby, — offering to the bride that always graces a banquet of this sort; but little Weber, with his enormous and frizzled head, was there to prevent the worthy woman from being shocked at this vulgar but traditional bit of pleasantry. She laughed at it, louder than any of the others, while Bélisaire grew redder and redder.

Then came songs. The mate was the first to rise; commanding silence with a glance, and laying his hand upon his heart, he began, in a sentimental but husky voice, a popular ballad of '48, — *Labor is pleasing to God.*

> "*Children of God, creator of the World,*
> *Let each one labor at his craft* —"

A sly fellow, that mate! He had understood just what sort of song would win the brave house-

hold he had just entered. But that he need not leave the company with too serious an impression, he attempted something in a lighter vein.

"Should you go to Charonne
The least you can do
Is to drink a glass at Savard's!"

Of the latter sort he knew hundreds. Ah! a famous comrade Monsieur and Madame Bélisaire would have in this fellow. What delightful evenings they would spend, Rue des Panoyaux. Meanwhile, the waiters had doubtless perceived the plundering committed by the hooked fingers of the Bélisaire tribe, for in a flash the table was cleared, stripped bare, as though by legerdemain. The banquet was ended! The guests gazed at each other in consternation. Above and around them they heard a frightful and bacchanalian din, the sound of dancing and singing that shook the boards so that they seemed to beat time. "What if we, too, have a dance?" "Yes, but it would cost too much for the music." Some one proposed they should avail themselves of that they heard on all sides, but, unfortunately, quadrilles, polkas, *varsoviennes*, schottisches mingled their varied measures with such enthusiasm, mid such a tumult of violins and cornets, that it was impossible to follow any of them.

"Ah, if we only had a piano," sighed Ida de Barancy, running her fingers over various articles of furniture, as though she really knew how to play. Madame Bélisaire would have liked a

dance equally well, but she had forbidden her husband any extra expense. Nevertheless, the hawker disappeared with his mate, and returned five minutes later, accompanied by a sort of village fiddler, who settled himself upon a little improvised platform, a pot of liquor between his legs, his violin firmly pressed against his shoulders. "And now! all the music you want till to-morrow morning, if you wish." The rustic fiddler, with a strong Berrichon accent, called, "Places for the pastourelle!" The women took the precaution of winding a handkerchief around their waists to protect their dresses from the hands of the dancers; the steps of the *bourrée*, introduced by Madame Bélisaire into all the figures of the quadrille, seemed to lend the flavor of some rustic open-air festival to this gilded tea-garden dance-hall. It was, indeed, suburban, the boundary line at which the traditions of country-life and the customs of Paris unite, are merged in each other. Ida alone and her Jack seemed lost in this place, as if they had dropped from the clouds into the submerged regions of popular life; and yet she enjoyed it all so much that it must have occurred to one who saw her, that in spite of pretensions to nobility, she saw here something which reminded her of a former period of her existence, revived remote memories of her youth. She laughed, frolicked, organized rounds, country dances, cotillions; and the rustle of her silk gown, the jingle of her bracelets impressed the others who parti-

cipated with a sense of profound admiration or of jealousy.

And so it was that Bélisaire's wedding did not lack for gayety. The bridegroom himself, delighted to make use of his new feet, made an enthusiastic muddle of all the figures of the quadrille; in the neighboring rooms the listeners remarked to each other, "What fun they are having!" and came to look on at the door left open by the waiters as they went among the guests, passing around bowls of sweetened wine. As always happens at festivals of this sort, the intruders soon began to slip in among the guests, so that their number was increased in a surprising manner. All this mob skipped about, shouted, and, above all, drank prodigiously, so that Madame Bélisaire would have felt very uneasy if her employer, the baker, had not announced that he would shoulder all the expenses of the ball. But now morning was close at hand. For some time the little Weber had been snoring away, laid upon a bench, and wrapped in his mother's flowered shawl. Jack had been making numerous signs to his mother, who pretended not to understand them, for she was carried away by the pleasure which her gay nature knew how to extract from her surroundings, no matter where she found herself. He was like some old papa, trying to drag his daughter away from a party:

"Come, it is late!"

She whirled on, in some one's arms, whose did not matter.

"In a minute. Wait!"

Then the revel assumed a disorderly and riotous character that disturbed him very much upon her account. The mate lost his head, and among the highly decorous *bourrées* of the former Madame Weber, he undertook to introduce a few attempts at the "*cavalier seul,*" executed upon his hands pipe in mouth! Jack succeeded in catching his mother on the wing, wrapped her in her great, hooded cloak, and bundled her into the last cab creeping along the avenue.

The Bélisaire family went soon after their departure, leaving their guests to make merry. There was no train at this early hour, and not an omnibus in sight. The newly-married couple decided to return a-foot through the Bois de Vincennes, Bélisaire giving his arm to his wife, and carrying the boy on his shoulders. The fresh air seemed delicious to them after the stifling atmosphere of the tea-garden, which looked dismal enough in the early morning. The little garden, full of empty bottles and big tubs, in which the glasses had been washed could be seen through the mist that had not yet lifted; it was strewn with bits of tulle and muslin, torn from the dresses of the dancers by their partners' heels. And while the scraping of the fiddle could still be heard on the ground-floor, the drowsy, stupefied waiters, sardonic-looking as ever, opened the windows upon the first, beat the carpets, watered the floors, already beginning to arrange the scenery for the next perform-

ance. Some of the dancers, completely fagged, with red faces and eyelids nearly closed, were seen inquiring for cabs, or falling asleep on the benches before the door, while they waited for the first train. Others were squabbling at the counter over the settling of bills; there were domestic scenes, quarrellings and actual battles. But Bélisaire and his wife were already far away from these victims of pleasure. With firm and joyous tread, their heads erect, they walked with rapid steps along a little cross-road, damp with the dew of the early morning, filled with the chirping of birds and matin calls; they entered Paris again by the great avenues of Bel-Air, shaded by acacias in bloom. It was quite a stretch, but they did not find the road a long one. The boy had slept all the way, his big head nestled confidingly upon the peddler's breast, not even waking when he was placed in his wicker crib, as soon as they reached home, at about six o'clock in the morning. Madame Bélisaire at once removed her beautiful indigo gown, her flowered cap, and put on her big blue apron with the bib. For her there was no such thing as Sunday. People have to eat bread on that day just the same as on the other days of the week. So she started at once on her rounds, and while her boy and her husband were sleeping soundly overhead, the brave woman went about, uttering her sonorous call: "Here is the bread!" stopping at every customer's door with a courageous, contented air, as if she had already be-

gun to pay off the expense of that magnificent wedding.

It did not require a long time for the new household to discover the mate's incapacity, and that they had made a bad business of it when they took him into partnership. The wedding banquet had already given Bélisaire some inkling of that gentleman's fondness for drink. Before a week had passed, the peddler was completely enlightened as to all his other vices; they resulted from an ingrained aversion to work, which pervaded the man's whole system like some foul humor, so that all his working faculties had rusted beyond repair. The mate was a locksmith by trade, but within the memory of his comrades he had never been seen to work, although he never appeared without his hammer upon his shoulder, his leather apron under his arm. This apron, which he never unrolled, served him frequently during the day as a pillow, when after too lengthy a stay in some public-house he felt the need of a siesta on some bench on the outer boulevards, or in some building-yard filled with old rubbish. As for the hammer, that was symbolic — an emblem, nothing more. He carried it just as some statue of Agriculture, placed in a public square, holds aloft its cornucopia, from which, however, nothing is ever seen to fall. Every morning before he started out he said, as he brandished that hammer: "I am going to look for work." But it is to be suspected from his gestures, the manner in which he talked through

his wild, shaggy beard, as he rolled his flaming eyes, that work grew frightened at sight of him and took to its heels; for the mate never found it in his journeyings, and spent most of his time prowling about the suburbs, from one pot-house to another, "doing the panther," as the Parisian workmen term it, doubtless in allusion to that restless and incessant pacing back and forth they see in the cages of the wild beasts, when they walk of a Sunday in the Jardin des Plantes.

At first Bélisaire and his wife were patient enough. The sententious air of the new mate imposed upon them just a little, and then he sang *Labor is pleasing to God* so finely! But as, when all was said and done, he ate with a magnificent appetite, the newly-married couple toiling from morn till eve, while the other "did the panther" all week long and brought in not one sou on that day worthy to be enrolled in the laborer's calendar as Holy Pay-day, they began to weary of him. Madame Bélisaire considered that he should merely be told to go, return to the streets, to that rubbish-heap off which the peddler had picked him in his eagerness to obtain a mate. But Bélisaire, who, perhaps because of the perfect happiness he enjoyed in his home and in his new boots, had grown kindlier than ever, entreated his wife to have patience. When a Jew undertakes to be generous, his generosity is inexhaustible.

"Who knows," he said, "but what he can be reformed, made over?"

So it was agreed that whenever Ribarot returned home, running up against the walls, his tongue thick, he should have no supper, which was a great deprivation for a drunkard who, by a beneficent dispensation of Nature's, was even hungrier upon those days than upon the others. And it was really a comedy to see the efforts he made to steady himself, to greet them without opening his mouth. But the bread-carrier was gifted with extraordinary sagacity, and often, as she ladled the soup, when the mate would present his plate, she would burst forth against him:

"Are n't you ashamed to come to the table at all in the state you are in? for you are tipsy again. Don't tell me! I have my eyes."

"Do you think he is?" Bélisaire would say. "Now, it seems to me —"

"All the same, I know what I know. Come, up and off with you, to your straw, and quick about it!"

The mate would arise, take his hammer and his apron, stammer a few dignified words, or something by way of entreaty, and with a mournful look in the direction of the steaming soup, would slink off like a dog, and go to bed in the little corner Bélisaire had occupied before his marriage. He was not quarrelsome when in liquor, and his bushy, unkempt barricade of a beard concealed merely the features of a weak, vicious child. When he was gone —

"Come, now," the peddler would say, pursing

his big, kindly mouth, — "come, now! give him a little soup, all the same."

"Oh, yes, I know. If one were to heed you — "

"But just this once. Come!"

The woman held out a little longer with that indignation felt by a woman of the people who works like a man when she sees a man who will not work at all. But at length she yielded, and Bélisaire would triumphantly carry a plate of soup to the mate in his kennel. He would return, deeply moved.

"Well? what did he say to you?"

"Really, he made me feel sorry for him, he seemed so downhearted. He says he drinks to forget how badly he feels at not finding work, at being such a burden to us."

"And what is to hinder him from finding work?"

"He says no one wants him because his clothes are not fit to be seen — that if he could spruce himself a bit — "

"Thank you! I have had quite enough of that! Spruce himself a bit! What became of that wedding-coat you had made for him, without a word to me? Why did he sell that?"

This question could not be answered. Yet these excellent people made one last effort, bought Ribarot a blouse and a pair of overalls. One fine morning he started off with a fresh shirt, a cravat made for him by Madame Bélisaire herself, and was not seen again for a week, at the end of which time he was discovered fast

asleep in his corner, stripped of the best part of his clothing, having saved from the wreck of his fortunes only his hammer and the everlasting leathern apron. After a few more escapades of this sort, they awaited only a suitable occasion to rid themselves of this intruder, who, instead of being a stay to the household, had become a very heavy burden upon it. Even Bélisaire himself was obliged to admit this fact as often as he complained of Ribarot to his friend Jack, who could understand the meaning of his complaint better than any one else, for he, too, had a mate who inconvenienced him terribly at times, but one of whom he could not complain. He loved her too well for that!

VII.

IDA FINDS LIFE DULL.

MADAME DE BARANCY'S first visit to Étiolles caused Jack much pleasure and great uneasiness. He was proud at the thought of having his mother with him again, but he knew what an erratic creature she was, how her tongue ran away with her, and how little she considered either her words or her acts. He feared Cécile's judgment, that sudden flash of insight, those swift and severe intuitions that come to youthful minds, even with regard to things of which they know nothing. But the first moments of the interview reassured him somewhat. Except for the pointed and melodramatic manner in which Ida addressed Cécile as "My daughter!" throwing her arms about the young girl's neck, everything passed off quite satisfactorily; but when, under the mellowing influence of an excellent dinner, Madame de Barancy lost somewhat of her gravity, and resumed the gayety of the woman who laughs merely to display her teeth, when she began to reel off her extravagant stories, all Jack's apprehensions returned. Joy and emotion had put her in a mood for adventures, and she kept her hearers under the spell of perpetual surprise. It

was mentioned that Monsieur Rivals had relatives in the Pyrenees.

"Oh, yes! the Pyrenees!" she sighed. "Gavarnie, the waterfalls, the glaciers! I made that journey fifteen years ago, with a friend of my family — the Duc de Cassarès — a Spaniard — yes, really, the brother of the general. But such a daredevil! Well I remember, I nearly broke my neck twenty times, at least, on his account. Just imagine! We used to drive with postilions and four horses, at full speed, and the carriage full of champagne! But he was a perfect original, that little Duke. I had made his acquaintance at Biarritz in such a comical fashion!"

Cécile having remarked that she loved the sea —

"Ah, my dear child, if you had ever seen it as I have seen it, off Palma, on a stormy night! I was in the saloon of the steamer with the captain, a vulgar fellow who tried to force me to drink punch. I said I would not. Then the wretch grew perfectly furious, opened the window in the stern, and took me by the neck (just like this! he was a very strong man!), and held me suspended over the water, in the rain and spray and lightning. It was dreadful."

Jack endeavored to cut short these dangerous recitals, but they always started off again at some other point, resembling those reptiles which, when cut, are full of life in every piece, and continue to squirm about, despite their mutilation.

This did not lessen the respectful and affectionate consideration Cécile manifested towards the mother of her lover, although she was somewhat disturbed that morning at Jack's air of preoccupation. But what were his emotions when, as the lesson began, he heard the young girl say to his mother: "Shall we go down into the garden?" Nothing could have been more natural, but the thought that the two would be alone together filled him with unspeakable terror. Good Heavens, what might she not tell Cécile! Whilst the doctor explained the lesson, he saw them walking side by side along a path of the orchard. Cécile, tall and slender, subdued in her gestures, like all truly elegant women, her pink skirt gently brushing the flowering thyme of the borders, Ida, majestic, still beautiful, but exuberant in dress and bearing. She wore a much befeathered hat, a remnant of some former toilette, she skipped about, affecting extreme youthfulness, stopping short now and then to make a sweeping gesture with her open parasol. She was doing all the talking, it was quite plain. Cécile from time to time raised her lovely face towards the window, where she saw, leaning towards each other, the curly head of the student and the white hair of the teacher. For the first time Jack found the lesson too long, and he was not happy until he was walking the forest paths, his betrothed leaning lightly upon his arm. That marvellous impulse which the sail gives to the boat, making it fly over the waters, the lover

felt it at the touch of Cécile's arm within his own. All the difficulties of life, the obstacles of the career he was attempting, he was certain he would conquer them all, aided by an inspiring influence that hovered over him in those mysterious regions whence fate unlooses her tempests. But on this day Ida's presence disturbed that delightful impression. Ida understood nothing of love; to her it was an absurdly sentimental affair, or else an escapade. As she pointed towards the lovers for the doctor's benefit, it was with a coarse little laugh, and many a *hum! hum!* or she would lean upon his arm, indulging in long, expressive, deep-drawn sighs. "Ah, doctor, what a fine thing youth is!" But worst of all was the sudden sensitiveness she showed with regard to the proprieties. She would call the young people back, thinking they had gone too far ahead. "Children, do not go so far away. We must keep you in sight!" and her glances were full of hidden meaning.

Two or three times Jack caught the good doctor grimacing. Evidently she annoyed him. But the forest was so beautiful, Cécile's affection so whole-hearted, the words they exchanged mingled so well with the humming of the bees, with the murmurs of swarms of midges circling in the tops of the oaks, chirpings from the nests, and the babble of rills hid amid the foliage, that the poor boy gradually forgot that other dreadful companion of his. But with Ida, the mind was never long at rest; something startling might

always be expected. All paused for a moment at the keeper's cottage. At sight of her former mistress, Mother Archambauld overwhelmed her with attentions and compliments of all sorts, but did not ask for Monsieur, understanding, with her quick peasant-wit, that he was a person who must not be mentioned. But the sight of this worthy creature, so long a part of her domestic life, proved disastrous for the former Madame d'Argenton. Declining to eat a morsel of the lunch which Mother Archambauld had hastily prepared in the parlor, she suddenly rose, rushed from the room, and went off alone towards Les Aulnettes, taking long quick steps, as though she had heard some one calling her. She desired to see *Parva domus* again.

The turret of the house was more overgrown than ever with wild vines and ivy, covering it, hiding it from top to bottom. Hirsch must have been away, for all the blinds were closed — and silence brooded about the garden, where the steps had grown green with mould, and showed not a trace of footprints. Ida paused for a moment, and listened to all that those mute but eloquent stones said to her. Then she broke off a branch of clematis, which overspread the wall with its myriads of tiny white star-like flowers, and seated upon the steps, with closed eyes, drank in its fragrance.

"What is the matter?" asked Jack, who had been searching anxiously for her for the last few minutes.

She answered, her face deluged with tears:

"Nothing! a passing emotion! So much of myself lies buried here!"

And in fact, the little house, wrapped in melancholy silence, its Latin inscription over the door, did resemble a tomb. She wiped her eyes, but her gayety did not return that day. In vain did Cécile, who had been told that Madame d'Argenton was separated from her husband, strive by her own tenderness to efface this painful impression. In vain did Jack strive to divert her mind from those past years by all his fine plans for the future.

"You see, my child," she said, as they were returning that evening to the station at Évry, "I shall not be able to accompany you here very often. I have suffered too much, the wound is too recent."

Her voice trembled as she spoke. So it seemed, after all this man had done, after all the humiliations, the indignities he had made her endure, she loved him still.

Some Sundays elapsed before Ida went again to Étiolles, and Jack was obliged to divide his holiday, spending half of it with Cécile, but giving up the pleasantest part of their meetings, their walks in the forest, the delightful talks they had enjoyed at twilight, seated upon the rustic bench in the orchard, in order that he might return to Paris to dine with his mother. He took an afternoon train, deserted and overheated, and left the calm of the forest behind him for the stir and

bustle of the suburban Sunday. The crowded omnibuses, the sidewalks invaded by the tables of small cafés, at which whole families would be seen sitting in front of illustrated papers, their beer before them, the crowds pausing to gape at a big yellow balloon rising over the gas-factory, — all these gatherings formed such a great contrast to the scene he had just left that he was startled and oppressed. In the Rue des Panoyaux he was reminded of provincial customs; games of battledore and shuttlecock were in progress in front of the doors, and in the yard surrounding the silent house, the concierge had brought chairs and was seated with friends, enjoying the freshness caused by repeated waterings. When he arrived, it was usual for him to find his mother talking in the corridor with the Levindré family. The Bélisaires who went out regularly every Sunday, from noon to midnight, would have been glad to take Madame de Barancy with them, but she was ashamed at the thought of being seen in the company of such poor people, and, besides, she enjoyed far more the society of that other pair of working people who hated work but were very fond of empty talk. The wife was a dressmaker by trade, but unable to begin work for the last two years, because she was waiting to purchase a sewing-machine which would cost six hundred francs, not a sou less. The husband, who had had at one time a business of his own as jeweller, declared he would not work where he could not be his own master. This couple managed to

live upon the aid they solicited from the relatives of one or the other of them, and their wretched home was a hotbed of rancor, revolt, and complaints against society. Ida agreed marvellously well with these nondescripts, was deeply moved at their distress, and was charmed with the admiration, the adulation lavished upon her by these creatures who hoped to extort from her the six hundred francs for a sewing-machine, or the amount necessary to start the husband in business, for she had told them that in spite of a temporary embarrassment in her affairs, she could be rich again whenever she chose. The gloomy and stifling corridor overheard many a confidence, many a sigh.

"Ah, Madame Levindré!"

"Ah, Madame de Barancy!"

And Monsieur Levindré, who had invented a whole political system, expounded it in pompous phrases, while from the hole where the mate slept off the effects of his wine a sonorous, monotonous snoring was heard. Sometimes, however, the Levindrés spent their Sundays with their relations and friends, or attended some entertainment of the Freemasons, which saved them the cost of a dinner. On such days, to escape from ennui, melancholy, and loneliness, Ida would descend to Madame Lévêque's circulating-library, where Jack always expected to find her upon his return.

This dingy little shop, full of green-backed books smelling of mold, was literally barricaded

with pamphlets, illustrated papers, a fortnight old, sensational leaflets at a sou apiece, pictures of the fashions outspread in front; the room had no air or light except that which came through the open door, hung with all kinds of colored pictures. In this shop lived an old, old woman, affected and slovenly in appearance; her days were passed in making from colored ribbons trimmings such as were commonly seen upon the reticules of our grandmothers. It appeared that Madame Lévêque had seen better days, and that under the First Empire her father had been quite an important personage — a court-usher or a porter in the palace.

"I am the god-daughter of the Duke of Dantzic," she told Ida, impressively. She was one of those venerable and stanch supporters of things past, such as one sometimes comes across in these eccentric quarters of Paris, like drift tossed ashore by its restless tide. Resembling the dusty stuff in her shop, her cambric-covered books, all of them torn, or lacking some of the pages, her conversation was full of romantic splendor, but the gilding had worn off. The spell of that magic reign, of which she had seen the end merely, had left its bewildering glitter in her eyes, and the very manner in which she said "*Messieurs les maréchaux*" was as good as a pageant in itself, seemed to invoke a world gay with plumes, embroideries and aiguillettes, caps bordered with white ermine. And then her anecdotes of Joséphine, the *bons-mots* of the Maréchale

Lefèvre! There was one especial story that Madame Lévêque told oftener, and with better effect than any other — an account of the fire at the Austrian Embassy, the night of the famous ball given by the Princess of Schwartzenberg. Her whole lifetime was still lighted by the glare of that famous fire, and in its flame she saw a glittering array of marshals, tall and décolletée dames, with coiffures *à la Titus*, or *à la Grecque*, and the emperor in a green coat and white breeches, carrying the fainting Madame de Schwartzenberg in his arms across the burning garden. With her mania for all things appertaining to the nobility, Ida found herself quite at home with this old fool. And while they sat in the gloomy shop, reeling off the names of dukes and marquises, like secondhand dealers sorting out old brasses or broken jewelry, some workman would enter to buy a halfpenny paper, or a daughter of the people, impatient for the continuation of some thrilling story, would come to see whether that number had come, and pay her penny for it, depriving herself of her tobacco if she was old, of her bunch of radishes for breakfast if young, in order that she might devour the adventures of *The Hunchback*, or *Monte Cristo*, with the passion for romances that is so strong in the people of Paris. Unfortunately, Madame Lévêque's grandchildren, who were tailors, and made liveries for the Faubourg Saint-Germain — "tailors to the nobility," she said — used to invite her to dinner once a fortnight. To while

away her Sunday on such occasions Madame de Barancy fell back upon the old literary rubbish of Madame Lévêque's shop. A collection of odd volumes, faded, soiled by all the fingers of the faubourg, and retaining between their leaves, which were hanging in tatters, bread crumbs or grease spots that showed they had been read during meals. They betrayed the idleness of the girls, the lazy workmen who had read them, and even revealed literary affectations, for many had pencilled notes or absurd remarks in the margin.

There she would remain, depressed and lonely, sitting before a window, reading novels until her brain whirled. She read to avoid thoughts and regrets. Out of her element, in this working man's home, the windows that told of industry did not inspire her with courage as they did her son, or spur her to work of any sort; they merely increased her lassitude and bitter aversion. The sad-faced woman who was always sewing at her window, the poor old creature who said so often, "People who can live in the country," etc., only heightened her ennui by their mute or spoken complaining. The pure sky, the warm summer sunshine above all this misery, made it seem drearier, just as the inactivity of her Sunday, disturbed by no other sound than the ringing of church-bells and the piping of swallows, oppressed her with its silence and tranquillity. She recalled other days: the walks and drives that had been a part of her former life, the excursions into the country recurred in her thoughts, gilded

with regret as by a setting sun. But those last years spent at Étiolles caused her the keenest pang. Oh, that charming life, those joyous dinners, the exclamations of new comers, the long evenings upon the Italian terrace, where HE stood, leaning against a pillar, his brow upraised, his arms outstretched, reciting in the moonlight:

"I do believe in love as I believe in God."

Where was he? What was he doing? Why had he never written her during those three months he had passed without news of her? Then the book would drop from her hands, and she would sit pensive, gazing distractedly into space, until her son returned. She would endeavor to greet him with a smile, but he at once understood her moral condition when he glanced at the disordered room, the untidy appearance of this woman, formerly so fond of dress, who now dragged herself about the attic in a faded wrapper and slovenly-looking sandals. Nothing was ready for dinner:

"You see! I have done nothing. It is so hot and stifling. And, besides, I feel so depressed."

"But why? Are you not contented here with me? Do you find it dull here?"

"Oh, no, no. Certainly not, — find it dull with you, my Jack!"

And she kissed him passionately, endeavoring to cling to him that she might escape from the abyss which she felt was engulfing her.

"Come, we will dine out," said Jack; "that will amuse you a little."

But Ida missed the supreme pleasure of arraying herself fashionably, of taking from the press, where they hung, any of her charming costumes of other days, too coquettish, too striking for her present station, whose elegance required a carriage, or, at least, another quarter of the city. And she dressed herself as modestly as possible for those walks through the squalid streets; notwithstanding, there was always some startling detail that would attract attention, either in the cut of her bodice, the wide folds of her gown, or her fashion of curling her hair. Jack assumed as discreet and sedate a manner as possible, that he might shield this mother of his, whose appearance suggested anything but respectability. They made their way among crowds of petty *bourgeois,* working men in their Sunday-clothes, walking slowly, following in each other's footsteps through the streets and boulevards where there was not a single sign-board that they did not know by heart; a curious mixture it was of honest faces and queer costumes, — coats high in the neck, shawls hanging down the back, clothes of antiquated cut, exhibited only on Sundays, that day devoted to exercise and rest, which fills the city with the tramp and murmur of a throng like that dispersing in every direction after an exhibition of fireworks. There is something of the same weariness, too, at the end of a Sunday already saddened by a thought of the cares of the morrow.

Jack and his mother followed that living tide, and paused at some little restaurant in Bagnolet or Romainville, and dined together, a melancholy meal. They tried to talk, to exchange ideas, but this was the great difficulty of their existence together. During the long years when they had been separated, life had meant a very different thing for each. When Ida's refinement revolted at the coarse wine-stained table-cloth of the cabaret, and she wiped her glass and spoon and fork in disgust, Jack scarcely noticed the untidiness of the table, too long accustomed to the sickening sights of poverty. But on the other hand, as his thoughts grew more elevated, and his intellect expanded day by day, he was astounded at his mother's vulgarity; in the old days she had been ignorant enough, but whatever native intelligence she had possessed had been warped by constant intercourse with the Failures. She had learned from d'Argenton certain formal phrases, tricks of speech, a peremptory and abrupt tone that appeared again and again in their discussions. "I — myself, I — myself," — so it always began or ended, accompanied by some contemptuous gesture that evidently signified, "It is really a great kindness for me to argue with you, a poor, miserable workman." Thanks to that miraculous resemblance which develops between husband and wife after a few years of life together, Jack was often dismayed at discovering upon his mother's lovely face the Enemy's expression, even that mocking smile that had been the dread of his

persecuted childhood. Never did sculptor, handling the plastic clay, mold it more skilfully than this mock-poet, determined to rule, had fashioned this poor creature.

After dinner one of their favorite walks on these long summer evenings was around the Square des Buttes Chaumont, which had just been completed, an immense gloomy square, improvised upon the ancient heights of Montfaucon, ornamented with grottoes, cascades, colonnades, bridges, precipices, and pine groves winding the entire length of the slope. This garden had an artificial and romantic appearance which made it assume in Ida's imagination the proportions of some vast park. She loved to trail her skirts over the sanded walks, admired the exotic shrubs, and the ruins on which she would have liked to inscribe her name. After they had promenaded through it, they ascended and sat upon a bench which spread before them the admirable view that can be seen from these heights. Paris, veiled in blue mist, bathed by a floating and distant dust, lay at their feet, — a gigantic caldron, and over it ascended warm mists and confused murmurs. The hills surrounding the environs, seen through this haze, seemed to form an immense circle, Montmartre on one side, Père-Lachaise on the other, meeting old Montfaucon.

Within closer range they could see the people enjoying themselves. In the winding walks, between the oblique rows of trees in the garden, petty tradesmen, in full dress, walked around

the band, while above, on what remained of the old heights, upon the worn patches of grass and the ochre-colored earth, working men's families, scattered like a great flock upon some mountain-side, ran, rolled about, made slides, and flew big kites with shouts that rung out in the clear air, over the heads of the pedestrians. A curious sight, this magnificent square, laid out in the very heart of the working man's quarter, a flattery of the Empire, bestowed upon the inhabitants of La Villette and Belleville; it seemed to them too well cared for, too carefully raked, and they soon abandoned it for the ancient hills, more picturesque, more rustic. Ida watched the popular games, not without disdain; here, too, her attitude, the drooping of her head resting within her palm, the curves she drew with her parasol in the sand, everything said: "How tedious all this is to me!" Jack felt himself quite powerless to banish this persistent melancholy, and would have been glad had he known some honest family, not too vulgar, where his mother might have found other women to whom she could have confided the puerilities of her mind. Once he fancied he had found what he sought. It was in that very garden of the Buttes-Chaumont, one Sunday afternoon. In front of them walked an old man, rustic in dress and manners, and very much bent; he wore a brown jacket, and was accompanied by two little children towards whom he leaned with that air of interest and steadfast patience that belongs only to a grandfather.

"That figure seems familiar to me," Jack said to his companion. "Yes, surely, I cannot be mistaken. It is Monsieur Roudic."

And Father Roudic it was, but so aged, so bowed, that the former apprentice of Indret could not have recognized him had it not been for the little granddaughter walking beside him, a sturdy, chubby-faced little creature, but a perfect copy, on a smaller scale, of Zénaïde, while the little boy wanted nothing but the cap of a custom-house officer to be the very image of Monsieur Mangin.

"Why, it 's the little chap himself," said the worthy fellow to Jack, when the latter accosted him, and the sad smile that lighted up his face revealed all the ravages that had altered it. Then Jack perceived there was a deep crape band upon his hat, and fearing to revive the memory of a recent sorrow, he did not dare to ask for any one; but Zénaïde made her appearance at a turn in the walk, looking more massive than ever, now that she had exchanged her skirt with the deep folds for a real gown, and her Guérande cap for a Parisian bonnet. A regular roly-poly she was, but so good-natured looking! She was leaning upon the arm of Monsieur Mangin, the former brigadier, who had been promoted in rank, and was now at the Paris customs, and dressed in a fine cloth suit with gold braid on the sleeves. How proud Zénaïde was of that handsome officer, how fond she seemed of him, in spite of the fact that she carried things with a high hand, and scarcely allowed him to put in a word edgewise.

It appeared, however, that Mangin liked to be led in this fashion, for he had a happy, open countenance, and the very way in which he looked at his wife revealed that, had he known her in the old days as well as now, he would have taken her without a dowry, if it was to do over again. Jack introduced his mother to both these worthy people, and then they walked on, forming two groups.

"What has happened?" he asked Zénaïde in a low tone. "Madame Clarisse? is she —"

"Yes, she is dead two years, — a frightful death. She was drowned in the Loire by accident."

Zénaïde added, in a still lower voice, "We say 'by accident' on father's account; but you, who knew her, Jack, can understand well enough that her death was no accident, that she committed suicide, broken-hearted because she could see her Nantais no more. Ah! such men as those! What is it they give us to drink?"

Kind-hearted Zénaïde! she never once suspected, as she said these words, how they stabbed Jack to the heart, as he thought of his mother, with a sigh.

"Poor Father Roudic," Zénaïde continued; "we thought he would die, too. And yet he has never suspected the truth. If he did! When Monsieur Mangin was promoted to Paris we brought him with us, and we all live together, Rue des Lilas, at Charonne, a little street full of gardens and near the custom-house barracks. You will come to see him, won't you, Jack?

You know he was always fond of the little chap! Perhaps, too, you can loosen his tongue. For we can never get him to talk to us now. The children are the only ones who amuse or interest him. Let us go back to him. He has been looking this way several times. He suspects we are talking about him, and he does not like that!"

Ida, who was carrying on an animated conversation with Monsieur Mangin, stopped short when she saw Jack approaching. A word of Father Roudic's enlightened him, however, as to the subject.

"Yes, yes, indeed, he was a great talker! and he was very fond of buckwheat cakes."

Then he understood that d'Argenton had been the topic of conversation. They had been asking Ida for news of her husband, and, delighted to talk of him, she had dilated at length upon that interesting subject. The poet's talent, his genius, his artistic struggles, the lofty position he adorned in literature, the plots of the dramas and romances that seethed in his brain, she told them all about it, analyzing everything, while the others listened politely, not understanding one word. On parting they all promised to meet again. Jack was delighted at having seen these worthy people, far more agreeable companions for his mother than the Lévêques, or the Levindrés, and in a better position, socially, than the Bélisaires. He visited them often with Ida, and found them in a small suburban house, with shells and sponges and hippocamps adorning the mantelpiece, just as at Indret, and the same

religious pictures that used to be in Zénaïde's chamber, — the great press, finished in iron, a whole Breton interior, expatriated, and transported bodily to the Paris fortifications, creating around them the illusory atmosphere of the country from which they came. He enjoyed these honest surroundings with their provincial neatness. But before very long he observed that his mother was bored in the society of Zénaïde; the latter was too industrious, too positive to please her, and here, too, as in every other place to which he had taken her, she was pursued by the selfsame melancholy and disgust which she expressed in these few words:

"It smells of the workman!"

The house in the Rue Panoyaux, the corridor, the room she shared with her son, the very bread she ate, — everything seemed to her to be impregnated with the odor, the peculiar flavor that belongs to the vitiated air of the poorer quarters where working men hive, where factory-smoke and the sweat of toil fill certain districts of a great city. It smells of the workman! If she opened her window, she recognized that smell in the courtyard; if she went out, the street brought her unsavory whiffs of it; and the people she saw, Jack even, when he returned from the shop, his blouse stained with oil, exhaled that same odor of poverty, which clung also to herself, filling her with that deep melancholy, that utter loathing of the things about her that leads to suicide.

VIII.

WHICH OF THE TWO?

ONE evening Jack found his mother greatly excited, her eyes glowing, her color brilliant, and without that lifeless appearance that had begun to make him uneasy concerning her.

"D'Argenton has written me," she said suddenly. "Yes, my dear, that man has dared write to me. After leaving me without a word for four months he has at last lost patience, finding that I have made no move. He has written to let me know that he has just returned to Paris, after a short journey, and that if I have need of him he is at my disposal."

"You do not need him, I fancy," said Jack, watching his mother with much concern.

"I! need him! You will see whether I can live without him. On the contrary, he is the one who finds himself very lonely without me; a man whose hands are good for nothing except to hold a pen! Ah! a fine artist he is!"

"Shall you reply to him?"

"Reply? To an impudent creature who dared raise his hand against me? Ah, you do not know me. I have too much pride for that, thank God! I did not even finish reading his letter,

and tossed it somewhere or other, torn into a thousand little bits! No, I thank you. Women nurtured as I have been, in a château, reared in opulence, are not the sort to endure such outbursts as those. All the same, I am curious to see what his quarters look like, now that I am no longer there to keep everything in order. A pretty mess of things there must be. Unless — but no, that is impossible. Such a fool as I is not met with every day. And, besides, it is quite evident that he has found life dull when he had to go away, and spend two months at a — a — Now, what is the name of that place?"

With great composure she drew from her pocket the letter which she had declared lost, torn into bits a moment before, and hunted for the name she wanted.

"Oh, yes, the Waters of Royat! That is where he went. What folly! Those mineral waters are the very worst thing for his health. After all, let him do as he chooses. It is none of my affair."

Jack blushed for her falsehood, and said nothing. But all the evening he felt that there hovered about the table the restless activity of a woman who is seeking to divert her own mind from the one train of thought by constantly bestirring herself. She had recovered her courageous spirits of those first days, and went about tidying the room, putting it in order, never sat down, bustled about, with reproachful intonations in her voice, and shakings of the head. Then she

came and leaned over Jack's chair, kissing him, and saying, in a caressing voice, "How brave you are, my dear; how well you study."

On the contrary, he was not studying well, for he was too much absorbed with what was passing in his mother's mind.

"Is it me she kisses?" he asked himself, and his suspicions were confirmed by a trifling detail, which proved how completely the past had triumphed and regained possession of this poor, weak woman's heart. She hummed incessantly a favorite ballad of d'Argenton's, a certain "waltz of the leaves," which the poet loved to strum at dusk, just before a light was brought in.

"Valsez, valsez comme des folles,
Pauvres feuilles, valsez, valsez."

Slow and sentimental, this refrain which she lengthened still more, lingering over the last notes, seemed to possess, to pursue her. She would leave it, resume some phrase in it, as though it marked the intervals of her thought. Air and words recalled to Jack painful memories filled with shame. Ah, if he had dared, what hard truths he would have told this senseless creature. How gladly he would have tossed to some rubbish-heap all those faded nosegays, those dead, withered leaves that kept up their mad waltzing in this poor empty brain, filling it with whirlwinds. But she was his mother. He loved her, desired by the respect he showed her, to inspire her with self-respect, and he said nothing.

But at this first warning his soul was filled with the jealous torments of one who is to be betrayed. He grew to watch her expression as he left home, her smile of greeting at his return. He dreaded, for her sake, the restless reveries that solitude weaves in the brain of an idle woman. And he could not have her watched; she was his mother. He could confide to no one the mistrust with which she inspired him. And yet, since that letter of d'Argenton's, Ida resumed her household cares with more fortitude than ever, busied herself with domestic affairs, prepared her son's dinner, and even brought forth from some corner, where it had lain forgotten, her account-book, full of white pages and blanks. And still Jack was mistrustful. He was familiar with the stories of deceived husbands, how they are surrounded vigilantly with small attentions, and how very often they can date their misfortune from the day when there were the first manifestations of an unuttered remorse. One day, as he returned from his work, he thought he saw Hirsch and Labassindre, arm-in-arm, turning the corner of the Rue des Panoyaux. What were they doing in that out-of-the-way quarter, so far from the *Review* and the Quai des Augustins?

"Has any one been here?" he asked the concierge, and from the manner of the reply he felt sure that he had been deceived, and that some plot was afoot against him. The following Sunday, as he returned from Étiolles, he found his mother so absorbed in her reading that she did

not hear him come up the stairs. He would not have given much attention to this fact, for he was familiar with her mania for novels; but the pamphlet which had lain open on her lap disappeared with a suddenness that was too marked to escape him.

"You frightened me!" she said at the same moment, purposely exaggerating the start he had given her, in order to divert Jack's attention.

"What was that you were reading?"

"Oh, nothing, nonsense only. How are your friends, the doctor and Cécile? Did you kiss the dear little thing for me?"

But as she spoke, a blush stole to her face, which the fine transparent skin could not conceal, for it was one of the peculiarities of that infantile nature, as ready at telling a lie as she was awkward in uttering it. Made uneasy by the glance that never left her face, she rose, and said with some annoyance:

"You wish to know what I am reading? There! Look at it."

He recognized the glazed cover of the *Review*, which he had read for the first time in the stoking-room of the Cydnus, but it was smaller by half, and printed upon very thin paper, wearing the appearance of a review that does not pay, and, in brief, the same absurd pomposity, high-sounding and meaningless titles, delirious social studies, science gleaned Heaven knows where, and doggerel verses. Jack would not even have opened this grotesque miscellany, if the following

title, heading the table of contents, had not attracted his attention: —

"SUNDERED.

"A Lyric Poem.

"BY THE VTE. AMAURY D'ARGENTON."

It began thus: —

"TO ONE WHO HAS FLOWN.

"What! not a word of farewell, not a turn of the head —
What! not a backward glance towards the deserted hearth,
What! —" .

Two hundred lengthy and closely-written lines followed, blackening the pages like the most tedious prose, and this was but the prelude. That there should be no mistake about it, the name of Charlotte, recurring every fourth or fifth line, enlightened the reader sufficiently; Jack threw down the pamphlet with a shrug of the shoulders.

"And that wretch dared send you this?"

"Yes, a number was left downstairs, two or three days ago," she answered timidly. "I do not know by whom."

There was a moment's silence. Ida longed to pick up the pamphlet again, but she did not dare. At last she stooped carelessly. Jack noted the movement.

"You are not going to keep that here, are you? Those verses are absurd."

She drew herself up:

"I do not find them so."

"Oh, nonsense! If he tries to pretend to us that he is moved, and calls '*coua, coua,*' all day long like a stork, it won't help; he cannot impress us in the least."

"Don't be unjust, Jack." (Her voice trembled.) "Heaven knows, I understand Monsieur d'Argenton better than any one else can, every defect of his nature, for I have suffered from it. Of the man I will admit what you choose. But the poet — that is another matter. It is the opinion of every one that Monsieur d'Argenton has struck the note of passion as no other in France has done, — the note of passion, my dear! Musset, too, was not without it, but lacked nobility, idealism. From that standpoint, *Love's Credo* is incomparable. And yet I think that the beginning of *Sundered* is even more affecting. That young woman going away in the morning, in her ball dress, in the mist, without one word of farewell, without one backward glance — "

Jack could not refrain from the indignant cry:

"But that woman — is you! And you know how you left, under what outrageous circumstances."

She answered, quivering all over: "My dear, it is no use for you to try to humiliate me, and to renew the insult by recalling it to me; the question here concerns art, and I believe I am a better judge of that than you are. If Monsieur

d'Argenton had outraged my nature a hundred times more than he has, that could not prevent me from recognizing that he is one of the most prominent literary men of the day. More than one speaks contemptuously of him to-day, who will be glad to say, in the future, "I knew him; I have sat at his table.'"

Whereupon she passed majestically from the room, to pay another call upon Madame Levindré, her eternal confidante, and Jack — who had resumed his work, for his only resource in trouble was the study that seemed to bring him closer to Cécile — soon heard the two neighbors reading aloud, with copious interruptions of enthusiastic exclamations and tears, which were betrayed by the noise their handkerchiefs made.

"We must take care. The enemy is near at hand," thought the poor boy, and he was not mistaken.

Amaury was as miserable, away from his Charlotte as she was listless and dull at being no longer with him. Victim and executioner, each was indispensable to the other, and they felt profoundly, each for himself, the void caused by their existence apart. From the first day of their separation, the poet had assumed the attitude of one whose heart is broken, and cultivated upon his big sallow face a dramatic and Byronic expression. He was to be seen in night-restaurants, supping in various public-houses, surrounded by sycophants and parasites whom he harangued about Her, always about Her. He

desired that the men and women who were there should say: —

"It is d'Argenton, the great poet. His mistress has left him. He is trying to forget his sorrow."

And, in fact, he tried hard to forget, — supped and passed his nights out; but this irregular and expensive mode of living soon wearied him. To be sure, it is grand to pound the table of a night-restaurant, and call "Waiter, pure absinthe for me!" and make the provincials around him say, "He is killing himself. It is on account of a woman." But when one's health will have none of it, and one is obliged to whisper to the waiter, "Add plenty of syrup," such posing is far too heroic. After a few days of this existence, d'Argenton had ruined his stomach, and his "attacks" grew more and more frequent. And now all the horror of Charlotte's absence was realized. What other woman would have endured his perpetual complaints, watched for the moment when his powders and various decoctions must be given, and brought them to him with the pious devotion of Monsieur Fagon, dosing the Great Monarch? All the childishness of an invalid returned to him. He was afraid to be left alone, and always had a companion with him, — Hirsch or some one else, lying upon the divan. The evenings seemed dismal to him, for about everything rested the disorder and dust that every woman, even such a scatterbrained creature as Ida, knows how to avoid around her. The fire

would not heat, the lamp burned badly, draughts whistled under the doors, and, touched in his egoism, which was really his most sensitive point, d'Argenton regretted his companion sincerely. He became actually ill, so hard he strove to appear so. Then he tried the distraction of travelling, but that succeeded scarcely better to judge from the lugubrious tone of his correspondence.

"Poor d'Argenton has just written me a heart-rending letter," one Failure would say to another with a sorrowful but complacent air. He wrote them all these — "heart-rending letters." They took the place of the "cutting words." But at home or abroad, one all-absorbing idea tortured him: "This woman can do without me, she is happy without me, through her son. Her son can take the place of every one to her." That thought exasperated him.

"Write a poem about her," said Moronval, finding him as disconsolate on his return as upon his departure. "That will relieve you."

He set to work at once, and one rhyme followed another, according to that system long before adopted by the poet, who never made an erasure. The prologue to *Sundered* was soon composed; but, unfortunately, this poetic composition, instead of calming him, only excited him still more. As he wished to show what he could do, he depicted an ideal Charlotte, more beautiful, more seraphic than the real, lifted to a height as unearthly as his overstrained imagina-

tion could reach. From that moment the separation became intolerable to him. As soon as the *Review* had published the Prologue to the poem, Hirsch and Labassindre were intrusted with the mission of leaving a copy in the Rue des Panoyaux. The snare set, d'Argenton, finding that he was really unable to live without Lolotte, resolved to strike a decided blow. Curled, pomatumed, his moustaches waxed *à la hongroise*, he took a cab which was to wait for him at the door, and presented himself in the Rue des Panoyaux at two o'clock in the afternoon, an hour when the women are alone, and all the factories of the neighborhood poured their curling columns of black smoke into the sky. Moronval went down to interview the concierge, and soon returned.

"You can go up. It is the sixth floor, at the end of the co'ido'. She is at home."

D'Argenton climbed the stairs. He was paler than usual, and his heart beat rapidly. O mysterious human nature! That such creatures as these have a heart, and that such a heart can beat! But he was moved less by love than the circumstances surrounding it, the romantic phase of the expedition, the carriage waiting at the street-corner as if for an elopement, and, above all, the gratification of his hate at the thought of Jack's disappointment when he should return from work, and find the bird had flown. This is the plan he had decided upon. He would appear before her without warning, fall at her feet, take

advantage of the confusion, the bewilderment in which this sudden surprise had thrown her, to embrace her, clasp her in his arms, say "Come, let us go," get her to enter the carriage, and then *bon voyage!* She must have changed greatly in the last three months if she was able to resist his fascination. That is why he had not prepared her for his coming, and stole softly along the passage, which exuded human wretchedness through its cracked walls, and the numerous doors, their keys plainly in sight, seeming to say: "There is nothing to steal here. Any one may enter."

He entered quickly, without knocking, uttering a mysteriously modulated "It is I."

Cruel disappointment — that disappointment ever dogging this man's majestic footsteps! Instead of Charlotte, it was Jack who confronted him, Jack, to whom a *fête* of his employers had given a holiday, which he devoted busily to his books, while Ida, stretched upon her bed in the alcove, was, as usual, shortening the tediousness of her idle life by a long afternoon nap. The two men gazed at each other, face to face, in utter amazement. On this occasion the poet did not have the advantage, for he was not upon his own ground, and, besides, how could he treat as an inferior a big fellow like that, whose bearing was so proud and intelligent, in whose features something of the mother's beauty appeared to render the lover still more despairing. "What do you want here?" asked Jack, standing in front of the doorway, and blocking it.

The other reddened, grew pale, and stammered:

"I thought — I was told that your mother is here."

"And she is here; but I am with her, and you shall not see her."

All this was said with great rapidity, in an undertone of which every word breathed hatred. And then Jack advanced towards his mother's lover with a violence that could be felt rather than seen; the latter was forced to recoil, and both found themselves in the entry. Dazed and confounded, d'Argenton tried to appear at his ease by striking an attitude and assuming a relenting, majestic air: —

"Jack," he said, "for a long time there has been a misunderstanding between us. But now, that you have grown to be a man, and in earnest, and know what life is, it is impossible that this misunderstanding should continue. I give you my hand, my dear child, — a loyal hand, that has never dissembled in its grasp."

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"Why this comedy between us, monsieur? You hate me, and I detest you."

"And since when are we such enemies, Jack?"

"From the first moment we met, I believe, monsieur. As far back as I can remember, my heart held only hatred for you. In fact, what else could we be for each other but enemies? What other name can I give you? *Ought* I even to know you? And if there have been moments

in my life when I thought of you without anger, is it possible that I could ever think of you without a blush?"

"True, Jack, I know that our relation to each other was a false one, very false. But you would not make me responsible for a chance, a fatality. And, after all, my dear friend, life is not a romance. We must not expect that it—"

But Jack cut him short in the midst of those wordy platitudes for which he was never at a loss.

"You are right, monsieur, life is not a romance. On the contrary, it is most serious and real. And, in proof, every moment of my time is employed, and I cannot lose it in idle discussions. For the last ten years my mother has belonged to you, been your servant, your creature. What I suffered during those years my childish pride never let you know, but—that aside, my mother is mine now. I have her again, and by every possible means I will keep her. I will never let her return to you. Why should I? What do you want with her now? Her hair is gray, she is wrinkled. She has shed too many tears already on your account. She is not now a pretty woman, a mistress who can satisfy your vanity. She is a mother,—my mother. Leave her to me."

They stood face to face at the head of the dingy and wretched stairway, over which came at intervals, the squalls of children, and echoes of the squabbles so frequent in that big hive of working

people. It was a fitting frame to this humiliating, heartrending scene, which stirred up so much shame at every word.

"You misinterpret strangely the meaning of my conduct," said the poet, grown very pale in spite of his self-possession. "I know that Charlotte is most deserving, and her resources very humble. I came as an old friend, to see that she wants for nothing, to see whether she has need of me."

"We need no one's assistance; my work suffices to support both of us."

"You have become very proud, my dear Jack. You were not so proud of old."

"True, monsieur. And for that reason, your presence, which I formerly endured, is loathsome to me now; and, I warn you, I will submit to that insult no longer."

Jack's attitude was so determined, so threatening, his look added such weight to his words, that the poet did not dare to say another word, and gravely retired; but as he descended the six flights of stairs, his careful attire, his curled hair, marked him out for special notice, and gave some idea of those social errors which, from one end to another of this strange Paris, are the means of uniting such strange contrasts. When Jack had seen him disappear, he returned to his quarters. Ida, very pale, her hair disordered, her eyes heavy with sleep and tears, was standing in wait for him at the door.

"I was there," she said, in a low voice. "I heard all — even that I was old and wrinkled."

He went up to her, clasped her hands, and looked straight into her face.

"He has not gone far. Do you wish me to call him back?"

She disengaged her hands, and, without hesitation, threw them about his neck, yielding to one of those impulses that saved her from actual vileness.

"No, Jack, you are right. I am your mother; only your mother. I will be nothing else."

Some days after this scene, Jack wrote Monsieur Rivals the following letter:

"My friend, my father, all is over. She has left me. And the circumstances were so painful, so unforeseen, that the blow is still more cruel. Alas, it is of my mother I speak. It would be better to keep silence, but I cannot. When I was a child, I knew a poor little negro who used to say, 'If the poor world could not sigh, it would choke.' I never understood what that meant till to-day. It seems to me that if I could not write you this letter and utter this deep sigh in your ears, there is a weight upon my heart which would stop its beating. I have not even the courage to wait until Sunday. It is too far away, and besides, before Cécile, I would not dare to speak. I told you, did I not, about the conversation I had with that man? From that day my poor mother was so dejected, what she attempted was so far beyond her strength, that I decided to change our quarters to divert her, and take her away from the scene of her grief. I understood that there would be a struggle, and that, if I would win, if I would keep my mother with me, I must resort to every means, every

possible stratagem. She disliked our street, our house. I must find something airier, brighter, that would keep her from regretting the Quai des Augustins. I hired at Charonne, Rue des Lilas, at the end of a market-gardener's place, three little rooms, lately put in repair, freshly papered, and I got nice furniture for them, and fitted them up more completely than the room I had before. All my small savings — pardon these details, but I promised to tell you everything — all I had saved for the past six months for fees and examinations was devoted to this purpose, and I felt sure you would approve. Bélisaire and his wife helped me in getting settled, assisted by kind Zénaïde, who lives in the same street with her father. I had counted upon her to cheer my poor mother. Everything had been kept a secret, to prepare a real lover's surprise, for, in this latest struggle, I felt that I must fight my enemy and rival upon his own ground. It seemed to me that she could not fail to be comfortable there. At that end of the suburbs, quiet as some village-street, the trees rising above the walls, the crowing of the cock heard through the rough planks of their inclosure, I felt all this must charm her, and bring back to her, in part, the illusion of that country-life she so much regretted.

"At last, yesterday evening, the house was ready to receive her; Bélisaire was to tell her that she would find me at the Roudics' and he was to come with her at the dinner-hour. I was there long before them, and was as happy as a child, proudly pacing back and forth in our little lodging which shone, so neat it was, with light curtains at every window, and great bunches of roses upon the mantelpiece. I had made a fire, for the evening was rather cool, and that gave a comfortable homelike

air to the place that delighted me. But — will you believe it? — in the midst of all my pleasure a sudden mournful presentiment came to me. It was as sharp, as rapid, as an electric spark. A voice said 'She will not come.' I thought I must be mad, prepared her chair, set her place at table, listened for her footstep in the silent street, walked back and forth through the rooms where everything was waiting for her, but all in vain. I knew she would not come. In every disappointment that has ever come to me, I have had these premonitions. It would seem that fate itself pitied me, and, before striking the blow, desired to warn me, that it might be less painful. She did not come. Bélisaire came alone, very late, with a note which she had given him for me. It was not long, merely a few hasty lines telling me that Monsieur d'Argenton was very ill and she considered it her duty to be at his bedside. As soon as he should recover, she would return. Ill! I had not thought of that, or I too might have complained, and kept her at my bedside as he had called her to his. Oh, how well he understood her, the wretch! How he had studied that nature, so weak, so kindly, so eager to devote itself to the care of others. You have attended him during those peculiar attacks which he complained of at Étiolles, and which wore off so soon at table after a good dinner. The same trouble has attacked him again. But my mother, happy that an opportunity offers her for returning to his good graces, has allowed herself to be taken in by this pretence. And to think that if I were to be ill, really ill, she would not perhaps believe me! To return to this wretched story, imagine me here all alone in my little pavilion, in the midst of these preparations for her welcome, after so many errands, efforts, so much money

spent to no purpose. Oh, she is cruel, cruel. I could not remain there. I returned to my old room. The house seemed to me too sad, sad as the house of death, for it seemed to me as if my mother had already lived in it. I went out, leaving the fire to die out upon the hearth, the roses to drop their petals noiselessly upon the marble. The house is leased for two years, and I shall keep it till the end of that term, with that superstitious feeling that makes one keep the cage from which a pet bird has flown, open and ready to welcome back the fugitive. If my mother returns, we will go there together. If she does not, I will never live there. My solitude would have all the gloom of death. And now I have told you all, I do not need to tell you that this letter is for yourself alone, and that Cécile must not read it. I would be too much ashamed. It seems to me that in her eyes some of this infamy would be reflected upon me, on the purity of my love for her. Perhaps she would cease to love me. Ah, my friend, what would become of me if such a disaster as that were to befall me? I have only her. Her tenderness takes the place of everything else for me, and in my deep despair, when I felt myself alone, confronting the irony of that empty house, I had but one thought, one cry escaped me — 'Cécile!' If she, too, were to abandon me! Ah! that is why the treachery of those we love inspires terror in us. It stirs within our hearts the apprehension of other treasons! But what am I thinking of? I have her word, her promise, and Cécile has never spoken a falsehood."

IX.

CÉCILE'S DECISION.

FOR a long while he still believed that his mother would return. Morning and evening, in the silent hours of study, he fancied many a time that he heard her dress rustling in the passage, her light step near the door. When he visited the Roudics', he always glanced towards the pavilion in the Rue des Lilas, hoping to find it open, and his Ida installed in that refuge whose address he had sent her, writing: "The little house is waiting for you. It is meant for you. Whenever you choose, you have only to come." No answer, not so much as a word. The desertion was an assured fact, final, more cruel than ever.

Jack suffered deeply. When a mother causes the pain, it wounds us as if God had misjudged us, been cruel; the grief seems an unnatural one. But Cécile was a sorceress. She knew the balms and simples and soothing remedies that bear the names of flowers, and shed perfume and healing. She knew the magic words that can calm; hers was the steadfast glance that can revivify, and her delicate, ingenious tenderness defied even the ruthlessness of fate. Toil, too, — unremit-

ting toil, — was a powerful consoler, a heavy, cumbersome shield against sorrow, but one that is a strong defence. While his mother was with him, she had often hindered him from working, all unconsciously, with her giddy and bird-like ways, her whims, her capricious will; she would suddenly prepare to go out, then take off her hat and shawl, and unexpectedly decide not to go. There was not the least awkward precaution she took not to disturb him but was in itself a disturbance. Now that she was gone, he made rapid progress, and soon redeemed his lost time. Every Sunday he went to Étiolles, more in love than ever, and more learned. The doctor was delighted with his pupil's progress; in less than a year, if he continued at this rate, he would be a bachelor, able to pass his first term at the medical college. That word "bachelor" made Jack smile delightedly, and when he uttered it before the Bélisaires, whose chum he had again become, after a fresh escapade of Ribarot's, the little garret in the Rue des Panoyaux grew radiant with light. The bread-woman, in her enthusiasm, acquired a sudden taste for science. In the evening, when she had finished her sewing, she made Bélisaire teach her to read, following the letters with the ends of her stubby fingers, that hid the letters, when she pointed them out. But if Monsieur Rivals was delighted with Jack's progress, he was not so well pleased with the state of his health. Since autumn set in, his former cough had returned, hollowing his cheeks, lighting his

eyes with a hard glitter, making the touch of his hand burn like fire.

"I don't like that," said the worthy man, anxious about his pupil; "you work too hard; your mind is too alert, too heated. You must put on the breaks, slow up a little. Deuce take it, you have plenty of time. Cécile will not run away."

No, she certainly had no intention of that. She had never been more tender, more attentive; she had never seemed nearer to him. It was as if she divined all the world of affection of which he had been deprived, and felt that, however tardily, she must console him for that birthright of happiness of which he had been robbed. And thus she spurred Jack on, incited in him a passion for work that nothing could abate. Whatever he did, encroaching upon the night, working seventeen hours a day, he felt no fatigue. And in that excited state, which seemed to increase his strength an hundredfold, the press of the Eyssendeck factory weighed no more in his hands than his pen.

The human body's resources are inexhaustible. Jack, by accustoming his to exciting nights and absolute indifference, had reached the condition of the Indian fakirs, that intense feverishness where pain itself becomes a sort of pleasure. He blessed even the cold of his attic, which drew him, at five o'clock, from the sound slumber of his twenty years, and was grateful even to that little dry cough that kept him up and wide awake,

late into the night. Sometimes, seated at his table, he would feel a sudden sensation of lightness in all his frame, the lucidity of the Seer, an extraordinary stir of every intellectual faculty mingled with intense physical weakness. It was as though he were suddenly lifted out of himself into a higher life. Then his pen would glide over the paper, and every difficulty of his work vanished. And he certainly would have accomplished the severe task he had set himself if an obstacle had not confronted him in the path upon which he had started with headlong speed. In such a case, the slightest shock is dangerous, and he was about to receive a terrible one.

"Do not come to-morrow. We are going away for a week. RIVALS."

Jack received this despatch from the doctor one Saturday evening, while Madame Bélisaire was ironing his best linen for the following day; his heart was already gladdened with the thought that Sunday had almost begun, for Saturday had nearly ended. The unexpectedness of this departure, the laconic brevity of the despatch, and the very indifference of those printed words, which replaced the familiar and friendly handwriting, all these things filled him with a strange sense of apprehension. He awaited a letter from the doctor or Cécile to explain this mystery, but none came; and for a whole week he was shaken by every sort of terror, shuddering at times with anguish, then transported with hope, his heart

oppressed or dilating, with no further motive than a cloud obscuring the sun or revealing it.

In fact, neither Cécile nor the doctor had gone away, and Monsieur Rivals was keeping the lover at a distance in order to prepare him for a terrible blow, — a sudden and most extraordinary decision of Cécile's, which he hoped his little granddaughter would reconsider. It had come most unexpectedly. One evening on his return, the doctor discovered Cécile with a startling expression upon her face, an air of sombre resolution about her pallid lips, and an unusual quiver of her lovely brown eyebrows. He strove in vain to make her smile during the dinner, and suddenly, as he was saying, — "Sunday, when Jack comes — "

"I do not wish him to come," she interrupted.

He looked at her in amazement. She repeated, pale as death, but with great firmness:

"I do not wish him to come. He must not."

"But what is the matter?"

"A serious one, grandfather; my marriage with Jack is impossible."

"Impossible? You frighten me. What has taken place?"

"Nothing; but I see things in a new light. I do not love him. I was mistaken."

"Alas for us! What has happened? Cécile, my child, come to your senses. This is some lovers' quarrel, mere childishness."

"Oh, no, grandpapa, there is not the least childishness about it; I have only a sister's love

for Jack, no more. I have tried to love him; I see now that it is impossible."

Sudden apprehension filled the doctor; the memory of his daughter passed swiftly through his mind.

"Do you love some one else?" he asked.

She blushed.

"No, no; I do not love any one. I do not wish to marry."

And to everything Monsieur Rivals could say, every entreaty of his, she had but one answer:

"I do not wish to marry."

Then he tried to touch her through her pride. What would people say in the neighborhood? The young man had been visiting them for months; every one knew they were betrothed. He was full of compassion, and strove to communicate it to her.

"Think what a terrible blow this will be; his life ruined, his future destroyed."

Cécile's features contracted spasmodically, showing how much she was moved. Monsieur Rivals took her hand:

"Come, little one, I implore you, don't be too hasty in a decision of this sort. Wait a little. You will see. You will consider."

But she answered calmly and firmly: "No, grandfather, it cannot be. He must be informed of this as soon as possible. I know that I shall cause him great suffering, but the longer it is delayed the worse it will be. Every day lost will increase the pain. And I could not endure

to look him in the face. I am incapable of such a lie, of such treachery."

"Then, you mean, I must give him his dismissal?" the doctor exclaimed, rising suddenly, in a fury. "It shall be done. But — *sacré tonnerre* — these women!"

She looked at him with such despair in her eyes, such a deathly change of color, that his wrath suddenly subsided.

"No, no, little one, I am not vexed; only for a moment. After all, what has happened is more my fault than yours. You were too young. I ought not to have — Ah, you old idiot, you old idiot! You will always be doing foolish things to the end."

The worst ordeal was writing to Jack. He made two or three rough drafts of a letter, always beginning like this — "Jack, my boy, the little one has changed her mind." He could not find a single word to add to "The little one has changed her mind." At last he said to himself, "I would rather speak to him." And to gain time, to be prepared for this painful interview, he put off Jack's visit a week, in the vague hope that Cécile might reconsider during that interval.

There was no further mention of the subject during the week; but the following Saturday Monsieur Rivals said to his granddaughter, "He is coming to-morrow; are you still of the same mind? Is your decision irrevocable?"

"Irrevocable," she answered firmly, each syllable of that inhuman word falling with measured emphasis from her lips.

Jack came Sunday, early as usual, and rushed from the Évry station to Étiolles. He had lost all semblance of composure as he crossed the threshold, which, notwithstanding, had ever been friendly to him, and ought to have reassured him with the memory of the many kindly welcomes he had received there.

"Monsieur is waiting for you in the garden," said the maid, as she opened the door.

And he felt a sudden numbness of the heart, foreboding disaster. The perturbed countenance of the worthy doctor did not reassure him, for the latter, whom forty years of anxious watching by the bedside of the sick had inured to the sight of human suffering, was trembling, and as uneasy as Jack himself.

"Is not Cécile here?"

Those were the poor boy's first words.

"No, my friend, I left her at — where we were. She will remain there for some time."

"Will she remain very long?"

"Yes, very long."

"And is it true, is it true that she won't have me now, Monsieur Rivals?"

The doctor did not answer. Jack seated himself upon a bench, for he felt like falling. They were at the end of the garden. Around them was a soft, clear November sky, a light frost whitened the ground, and a floating haze, veiling a Martinmas sun, recalled to him the day spent at Coudray, the vintage, the hill overlooking the Seine, and those first stammering notes of love

breathed in the great open ear of Nature, like the timid cries of a bird that tries its wings for the first time. What an anniversary! After a moment's silence, the doctor placed his hand paternally upon the young man's shoulder.

"Jack," he said, "do not grieve too much. She may change her mind. She is so young. Perhaps it is merely a caprice."

"Oh, no, Monsieur Rivals. Cécile is not capricious. To plunge a knife in the heart of another out of mere caprice, that would be too horrible. No, I am sure that she must have reflected not a little before taking this resolve, and that it is a very painful one for her. She knows what her love meant for my life, and that if it is taken from me, my whole life goes with it. If she has done this, it is because she believes it to be her duty. I might have expected it. Was it possible such happiness should be mine? If you knew how many times I have told myself, 'It is all too beautiful. It will never be.' And you see, it was not to be."

By a mighty effort he choked down the sob that was strangling him. He rose with difficulty. Monsieur Rivals took both his hands.

"Forgive me, my poor boy. It is I who am to blame for all this. But I thought to make two people happy."

"No, Monsieur Rivals, do not reproach yourself. It had to be so. Cécile was too far above me to love me. The pity she felt for me deceived her for a moment; her kind heart led her astray.

But now she sees more clearly, and the distance that separates us frightens her. No matter! Listen carefully, dear friend, and tell her this from me. One thing will always hinder me from harboring a single unkind thought towards her, though this blow she has dealt crushes me."

With a sweeping gesture he pointed towards the fields, the sky, and the whole horizon.

"Last year, upon such a day as this, I felt that I loved Cécile, and believèd that she might love me; I entered upon the happiest, the only happy period of my life, — a year so complete, so incomparable, that when I think of it, it seems to me an entire lifetime. On that day I was born, and to-day I die. That blessed time, that complete forgetfulness of the wretched fate that pursues me, I owe to you and Cécile. I shall never forget it."

Very gently he withdrew his hands from the doctor's convulsive grasp.

"Are you going, Jack? Won't you breakfast with me?"

"No, thank you, Monsieur Rivals, I—I should be too sad a guest."

He paused through the garden with a firm step, went out, and disappeared rapidly without one backward glance. Had he looked back, he would have seen at an upper-story window, behind the white curtain, partly raised, his beloved, as pale and trembling as himself, weeping, stretching her arms towards him, although she did not attempt to recall him. The days that followed

were sad ones for the Rivals. The little house, which had grown bright and young again in the last few months, resumed the gloomy appearance of other days, even gloomier than of yore, for all its joy had departed. The doctor watched his granddaughter with great anxiety, — her lonely walks in the garden, the prolonged vigils in her mother's room, open now, for she seemed to make it her own, by right of her sorrow. Where Madeleine had wept of old, Cécile wept now, and the poor grandfather might almost have been deceived into believing that that youthful face, bowed before the window, in the silence and deep depression of an unavowed sorrow, was his daughter's. Would Cécile die, too? Why? what ailed her? If she did not love Jack, what was the cause of this sadness, this longing for solitude, this languor that even the forced activity of her household cares could not dispel? And if she still loved him, why had she refused him? The good doctor felt that here was some mystery he could not fathom, some inner conflict, but at the least word, the slightest question, Cécile baffled and evaded him, as though she were responsible to herself alone for the supreme decisions of her conscience. The worthy man was so greatly alarmed at his granddaughter's conduct, that he was beginning to forget Jack's grief. He was busied with his own, pondering and speculating, and the gig that carried him on his rounds at all hours, and his old horse, which was growing more and more unmanageable, might

have told the story of his perturbed mind, if only by his strange manner of driving.

One night the house-bell rang, summoning him to a sick man. He found old Mother Salé awaiting him on the road, loudly lamenting. It seemed that this time "her man — her poo' man" — had "decided to die." Monsieur Rivals, whom neither sorrow nor old age could prevent from starting off at the first summons, hastened from Étiolles to Aulnettes. The Salés lived near *Parva domus*, in a little hole hollowed out in the roadside, a single room, into which one descended as if it were a cellar, a peasant lair of the time of La Bruyère, that had survived all the neighboring châteaux. It was filthy, gloomy, a wretched shelter. The flooring was the beaten ground, the only furniture a broken press, and a few rickety stools; the only light was that of a great fire of stolen wood, full of sap, and crackling as it burned. And everything told the same story of thieving: bits of ancient, carved wood — the woodwork piled against the walls, a gun standing at a corner by the fireside, traps and snares, and those immense nets the poacher spreads upon the harvest-field in autumn, as the fisherman his sweep-net. Upon a pallet in a dark corner, in the midst of all this dishonest poverty, the old man lay dying. He was dying of sixty years' poaching, of night-watches in ditches, in the snow, in the marshes, dying of hasty retreats, with mounted gendarmes at his heels. His had been the life of an old hare, a constant marauder,

and he was lucky, indeed, to end it in his hole. As he entered, Monsieur Rivals was almost suffocated by an odor of burnt herbs, which was stronger even than the stench of the hovel.

"What the devil have you been burning here, Mother Salé?" he asked.

The old woman was confused, tried to lie, but he did not give her time enough.

"So, then, our neighbor, the poisoner, has been here?"

Monsieur Rivals was not mistaken. For some time Hirsch had been experimenting upon this poor wretch with his suspicious medication by perfumes. Such opportunities had become quite rare for him. The country people mistrusted him, and, in fact, he was compelled to take extreme precaution, for the Étiolles doctor was unremitting in his hostility against his quack science. Twice already he had been summoned before the magistrates at Corbeil, and threatened with severe penalties if he continued to practise. But the neighborhood of the Salés, their abject condition, tempted him again, despite his fear of the gendarmes.

"Quick, quick, open the door, the window. Don't you see that the poor wretch is suffocating?"

The old woman made haste to execute the doctor's orders, muttering to herself:

"Oh, my poor man, my poor man! He said so often he would cure him. Is it possible to

deceive people like that? Poor crazy fool of a countrywoman that I am!"

As Monsieur Rivals, bending over the dying man, felt his scarcely perceptible pulse, to discover how much life remained, a hollow voice proceeded from the rags on the pallet:

"Tell him, wife; you said you would tell him."

The old woman continued to talk with volubility, poking the fagots on the hearth. But the dying man began again, his voice growing more feeble:

"Tell him, tell him, wife."

Monsieur Rivals glanced at Mother Salé, whose old, brown, squaw-like face had become brick-colored. She came closer, and stammered:

"Well, well! Sure enough, it 's the fault of that doctor over there, if I hurt such a kind young lady's feelings."

"What young lady? Of whom are you speaking?" asked the doctor, abruptly, dropping his patient's hand.

She hesitated, but the poacher's voice growing fainter and fainter, as if it came from a distance, murmured again: "Tell him, you must tell him."

"There, there! I 'll tell him, then," said the old woman, resolutely. "It is just like this, my good Monsieur Rivals. That blackguard over there gave me twenty francs — Lord Jesus, what villains there are in this world! — he gave me twenty francs if I would tell Mam'selle Cécile the story of her papa and mamma."

"Scoundrel!" cried old Rivals, with a burst

of rage that restored all the energy and impetuosity of his youth.

He seized the horrible peasant, and shook her roughly.

"Did you dare do that?"

"For the twenty francs, my good sir, — if that villain had not given me twenty francs I would have died before I spoke a word. And as true as that Christian there is almost a dead man, I knew nothing at all, nothing about that business. He told me all about it, so that I could tell about it afterwards."

"Oh, the wretch! He said he would have revenge. But who could have informed him and guided his vengeance so well?"

A deep wail, one of those indistinct cries a human being utters when he enters the world, or leaves it, recalled the doctor to the old man's pallet. Now that she had "told it," old Salé allowed death to have its way, and perhaps that slight remnant of conscientious scruple in an old vagabond who had committed so many crimes may have eased for him the awful passing over. Until morning the doctor remained by that agonized figure, watching that slender thread of existence which, at the first thrill of dawn, tapping with pallid fingers upon the window-panes, would be borne away. It required a stout heart to remain face to face with that dying man, and the old hag squatting by the hearth, daring neither to look at him, or speak to him. And while duty detained him there, he thought and thought,

passing from one idea to another, and trying to fit together the various links in the chain of this vile plot, which was still partly obscure to him. When all was over, he returned in haste to Étiolles, but not before he had ascertained that the infamous Hirsch was no longer at *Parva domus.* Ah, if he could have laid hands upon him at that moment, all the former violence of the naval surgeon would have come to his aid at sight of this cowardly enemy, who, to be revenged, had attacked his little granddaughter. On his return he went direct to Cécile's room. No one was there. The bed itself had not been opened. A shudder seized him. He went into the pharmacy, and found no one there. But Madeleine's former chamber was open, and there, among the relics of the dead girl so well loved, on the prie-Dieu where she had knelt so often in sorrow, he found Cécile, fast asleep, her bowed figure revealing that she had passed the whole night in prayer and tears. At the sound of the doctor's footsteps she opened her eyes.

"Grandfather!"

"So the wretches told you the secret we had been at such pains to conceal from you! O God! after so many efforts, such precautions to spare you this sorrow, that it should come to you through strangers, enemies. Poor little one!"

She hid her head upon his shoulder. "Do not speak of it. Tell me nothing. I am ashamed."

"But I must speak to you. Ah, if I had suspected the real cause of your refusal! For this

is the reason, is it not, that you did not wish to marry?"

"Yes."

"But why? Explain your reason."

"I did not wish to confess my mother's dishonor to him, — and my conscience forbade my concealing anything from the man who was to be my husband. There was only one course to follow, and I followed it."

"Then you love him; you love him still?"

"With all my soul. And I believe that he loved me so well that he would have refused to break off our marriage; it was my part to spare him such a sacrifice. A man does not marry a nameless girl, who, if she has a name at all, bears that of a thief, a forger."

"You are mistaken, my child. Jack was proud and happy at the thought of marrying you, though he knew your history. It was I myself who told it to him."

"Is it possible?"

"Ah, naughty child, if you had had a little more confidence in me I could have spared you from this thrust, that has plunged a dagger into the hearts of all three of us."

"Then Jack knew what I was?"

"Child! he loved you — and — Besides, your destinies resemble each other. He knew no father, like yourself, and his mother was never married; the only difference is that your mother was a saint, while his — "

Then, as he had related Cécile's history to Jack,

he related Jack's history to Cécile, — the long martyrdom of that poor fellow whose nature was so affectionate and good, his desolate childhood, his youthful exile; and suddenly, as if in recalling that past he was able to understand the present more clearly, he exclaimed:

"Now I think of it, it is she! The blow comes from her. She must have been talking of your marriage before Hirsch. Yes, yes, I am sure of it now. It is through that fool the drama I had kept from you so carefully has come to your knowledge. There's fatality in it. Such a thrust as that, directed at that poor boy, could have come only from his mother."

Listening to these explanations, Cécile was seized with deep despair, as she thought of the needless and frightful agony she had caused poor Jack, so unhappy before. She longed to beg his pardon, to humiliate herself before him.

"Jack — poor darling," she said again and again through her sobs.

And measuring the wound she had inflicted by her own sorrow, she thought:

"How he must have suffered."

"And he still suffers, believe me."

"Have you had any news from him, grandfather?"

"No, but he might perhaps come himself, and bring you news," said the grandfather with a smile.

"Perhaps he will not care to come now."

"Very well. We will go to him. This is

Sunday. He will not be at work. We will find him and bring him back here. Will that please you?"

"Would it please me!"

Some hours later, Monsieur Rivals and his granddaughter were on the way to Paris.

Just after they had gone, a man, covered with perspiration, and bending under the weight of a heavy basket, paused before their house. He looked at the little green door, with its brass plate, and spelt out laboriously, "DOC—TOR'S B—ELL."

"It is here!" he said at last, and wiped his forehead. The little maid arrived, but seeing this was one of those dangerous hawkers who tramp about the country, she opened the door just a little.

"What do you want?"

"The gentleman who lives here."

"He is not at home."

"And the young lady?"

"She is gone away, too."

"When will they return?"

"I do not know."

And the door was rudely shut in his face.

"Good God! Good God!" exclaimed the peddler, hoarsely. "Will they leave him to die like that?"

And he remained standing in the middle of the road, shocked and bewildered.

X.

THE PARVIS NOTRE-DAME.

THAT evening there was to be a grand literary reunion on the Quai des Augustins near the Institute, at the invitation of the Editor-in-chief of the *Review of the Races of the Future.* All the Failures were out in full force, summoned to this feast given in honor of Charlotte's return, which d'Argenton was to solemnize still further by reading his great poem, "Sundered," which was at last finished. A peculiar combination of circumstances had marked the completion of this masterpiece. Charlotte restored to the fold, how could he continue to deplore the absence of this ingrate, and describe the anguish of the deserted lover? The situation was dangerously near the ridiculous, and this was indeed a pity, for the sources of the poet's inspiration had never been more abundant, his efforts more sustained. After some hesitation he boldly decided.

"It can't be undone. I will go on. A work of art should not be abandoned because of the uncertainty of human affairs."

And there presented itself the ludicrous spectacle of a poet lamenting the desertion of his mis-

tress, in the presence of the lady herself, who heard herself designated as "cruel one," "perfidious," "dear wanderer," copied out all these charming epithets in her own handwriting, and tied the manuscript with pink ribbons. The poem completed, d'Argenton desired to read it to his followers, less from artistic vanity than for the self-glorification of the lover, to inform all the Failures that his slave had returned, and he had her secure this time. Never before had the little apartment on the fourth floor witnessed an affair so sumptuous in its arrangements, such an extravagant display of flowers, of hangings, of refreshments; the toilette of the dear *absente* herself was pure white, sprinkled with violets, and in perfect harmony with the mute rôle that would be hers during the reading. No one would have suspected, on entering the establishment, that the pressing need of money hid beneath all these splendors, like the invisible web of a spider ready to ensnare the wings of a butterfly. Yet such was the case. The *Review* was dying a natural death, each number diminished in size, and appearing only at rare intervals, farther and farther apart. D'Argenton, after having sunk half of his inheritance in it, was now anxious to sell it. It was this lamentable state of affairs, combined with a few "attacks" skilfully managed, that had restored the doting Charlotte to her "artist" forever. He had only to pose before her as a great man vanquished, exhausted, abandoned by all, doubting even the constancy of his star which he had

sighted long ago, and she was ready to renew her solemn vows.

"From this day I belong to you alone. I am yours forever!"

And yet this d'Argenton was merely a fool, a charlatan, but it must be admitted that he played upon this woman in a masterly fashion, and could obtain marvellous effects from that vulgar instrument. It was wonderful to see how her eyes rested upon him that entire evening; how genial he seemed to her, how ill, how fascinating! As fascinating as when, twelve years before, he had appeared to her, beneath the opal globes of the Moronval drawing-room — more seductive perhaps, for here his surroundings were different, richer, more comfortable, and numerous rays had been added to her poet's aureole. For the rest, there was the old circle, the personnel was immutable. Here was Labassindre, in bottle-green velvet, and Faust's high boots, Dr. Hirsch, spotted with chemical stains and Moronval in a black coat very dingy at the seams, a white tie very dirty in the creases; then there was a batch of "little tropicals," the everlasting Egyptian with the distended skin, the saffron-colored Japanese, the nephew of Berzelius, and the man who had read Proudhon. Here was the whole grotesque procession, lean, emaciated, famished as ever, and it had not lost a single one of its illusions; the hands were as feverish as ever, the lashless eyelids inflamed from star-gazing. It might have seemed a band of Eastern pilgrims, marching towards some unknown

Mecca whose golden lamp constantly eluded them upon the horizon. In the twelve years that we have known these unfortunate Failures, some have fallen by the wayside, but other fanatics have risen from the very pavement of Paris, to replace the dead, and close the ranks. Nothing can dishearten them, neither disappointments, nor sickness, neither cold, heat, nor hunger. They are always upon the go, always in haste. And they never arrive! In the midst of these, d'Argenton, better dressed, better fed, resembled some rich hadji, journeying in company with his beggarly companions, with his harem, his pipes, his wealth. Satisfied vanity and serene consciousness of triumph lent added lustre to his radiance upon that evening.

During the reading, Charlotte, seated upon the divan, in an attitude of would-be indifference, blushed at the allusions in every strophe, which were very thinly veiled, and like coquettes, enveloped in an air of mystery, but delighted at being recognized. Around her sat the wives of the Failures, their heads bowed in an attitude of abject flattery; and among them was little Madame Moronval, who appeared quite tall when seated, because of the enormous height of her forehead and length of chin; she wiped her eyes every now and then, to show her emotion, a bit of hypocrisy scarcely befitting a Moronval *née* Decostère; but poverty levels the loftiest pride. Moronval was seated opposite his wife, and watched her, leading the claque, his monkey-like face assuming a thousand varied expressions, indi-

cative of extraordinary admiration, though he bit his nails furiously, which was always a fore-runner of the fact that he wanted to borrow. Before an audience so favorably disposed, the verses were reeled off with a monotonous and distressing slowness; it was like the motion of a spinning-wheel, winding an interminable skein. And still there was more of it, and more, and more! It mingled with the crackling of the fire, the occasional sputter of the lamps, the sound of the wind straying across the balcony, howling at the windows with sudden fury, as upon a certain night, never to be forgotten. But upon this evening Charlotte's mind was not in that uneasy condition that predisposes one to apprehensions and presentiments. She belonged completely to her poet, to the drama he was reciting, scanning the rhythm emphatically. There was one part of the poem which was really very dramatic. In the last canto d'Argenton represented his dear *absente* as having returned to her lover, and dying of the sufferings she had endured, separated from him. The poet closed his eyes, vowing eternal love for her:

'With thee, in the grave I have laid
The better part of me,
My tears, my love for thee."

So he said. And it was so deeply affecting, the greatness of soul in this man who was willing to forget everything, and the melancholy fate of this unhappy creature, that all his listeners sobbed, Charlotte herself more loudly than all the rest,

for, you know, after all, the death in the poem was her own, and when such an event happens to yourself, you must be more deeply affected by it than any other!

Suddenly, in the middle of that pathetic passage, as d'Argenton's glance fell complacently over his audience, the door of the drawing-room suddenly opened, and the servant, one of those very familiar, much be-ribboned servants generally to be found in the service of women of this sort, entered the room with a terrified air, crying to her mistress:

"Madame! Madame!"

All rose.

"What is it? What has happened?"

"There is a man —"

"A man?"

"Yes, a dreadful, wicked-looking man, who wishes to speak to Madame. I said to him that Madame was not at home, and that he could not see her. Then he sat down on the step, and said that he would wait."

"I will go," said Charlotte, as much excited as though she suspected from whom the messenger came.

"On no account, on no account," d'Argenton interposed quickly.

And turning towards Labassindre, who was the most robust figure in the group, he said:

"Go and see who the intruder is."

"Here you are; I am ready! *Beûh!*" said the singer, throwing out his shoulders.

D'Argenton had still a hemistich cut in two, trembling on his lips, and precipitately resumed his position by the mantelpiece, ready to go on with the reading where it had been interrupted. But the door opened once more, this time, to admit Labassindre, who beckoned the poet. D'Argenton rushed into the ante-room in a rage.

"What is the matter? Be quick!"

"It seems that Jack is very ill," said the singer, in a low voice.

"Nonsense. That won't go down here."

"This poor devil says so." D'Argenton looked at the poor devil, an ugly and timid figure, whose long, bent outline, as it appeared in the doorway, seemed not unfamiliar to him.

"Were you sent by the gentleman himself?"

"No, not by him," answered the other. "He is too ill to send any one. He has been in bed for three weeks, very, very ill."

"What ails him?"

"Something in the lungs, and the doctor says he can't last a week. So we thought, my wife and I, that his mother ought to be told, and I came."

"And who are you?"

"I am Bélisaire, — Bel the lady used to call me. Oh, she knew me very well, I can tell you, and my wife, too."

"Very well, Monsieur Bélisaire," said the poet, with a bantering air. "You may say to him who sent you that it is a clever trick, but it won't work. He must try some other."

"What 's that?" asked the peddler, who could not understand "cutting words."

But the door had already closed, leaving Bélisaire standing dumfounded on the landing, but not before he caught an indistinct glimpse of a well-lighted drawing-room filled with people.

"It was nothing. Somebody who had made a mistake," said the poet on his return, and he continued his reading majestically, while the peddler passed rapidly through the dark streets, beneath the sleet and the cutting wind, hastening to return to Jack, the poor mate, stretched at that moment upon a wretched bed in his attic. He had been taken ill one day on returning from Étiolles. He had taken to bed without saying anything, and since then had been tortured with fever and a heavy cold, which was so serious that the doctor of the factory warned his friends that he was dangerously ill. Bélisaire wished to send word to Monsieur Rivals, but Jack expressly forbade this. Indeed, his lethargic silence was broken only upon that occasion, and once again, when he sent the bread-carrier to sell his watch and a ring his mother had given him; for money was not too plenty in the Rue des Panoyaux. All Jack's savings had been spent in purchasing the humble furniture for the little home at Charonne; no sound of money in the empty drawers, and the expense of the wedding and going to housekeeping had exhausted Bélisaire's funds. No matter! to take care of that unfortunate and abandoned one, the peddler and his wife felt

gendarmes and constables, in spite of his peddler's license, that he had acquired an attitude of abject humility, and all his wife's valor could not reform him.

"If I had gone myself, I am sure I should have brought her back with me," said the worthy woman, wringing her hands.

"Let her alone, my dear," replied Madame Levindré, harshly; "you do not know what those women are like." She said "those women," now that Ida was gone, and she had lost all hope of ever obtaining a sewing-machine, or the funds that were to aid her husband. He also was a frequent visitor in the evening, for it was not difficult to enter poor dwellings such as these, with the key hanging outside upon the door. He came to the invalid's room, under pretext of obtaining the latest news. When he learned that the lady had not appeared, Monsieur Levindré began a long tirade upon the modern Phryne, the disgrace of our society, and unfolded a political system of his own that was to rid the world of all this "scum." The others listened, open-mouthed, to this tedious and interminable twaddler, while the wind blew upon the dying fire, and Jack's deep cough sounded from under the sheets.

"All that is of no use," said Madame Bélisaire, who never wandered far from the subject. "What are we going to do? We cannot leave the poor boy to die for lack of care."

The Levindrés advised:

"You must do as the doctor said. You must

take him to the Parvis Notre-Dame, the Central Bureau. There they will give him an admission-card for a hospital."

"Hush, hush! not so loud," exclaimed Bélisaire, pointing towards the alcove where the sick boy lay tossing with fever. There was a moment's silence, interrupted only by the rustling of the coarse rumpled sheets.

"I am sure he heard you," added the peddler, in a tone of annoyance.

"So much the better. He is neither your brother nor your son, and you will be well rid of him if you send him to the hospital."

"But he is our mate!" said Bélisaire, and he uttered the word with all the pride and devotion of his brave and simple heart. There was something so touching in his voice that the bread-carrier's face was suddenly suffused with red, and tears glistened in her eyes. The Levindrés left the room, shrugging their shoulders; and after they had gone it seemed less cold and bare than before.

Jack had overheard. In fact, nothing that was said around him escaped his ears. Since his terrible relapse, with the return of the former malady that had attacked his lungs, heartbroken by the disappointment his love had suffered, he remained in bed as if pinioned there, but rarely sleeping; he seemed to have turned voluntarily aside from the life about him; he sought shelter in a silence that even his hallucinations and the fever itself could not break.

His eyes turned towards the end of his alcove, remained wide open all day long; and if the wall — that dingy wall, cracked and wrinkled as the face of some old crone — could have spoken, it could have told what was written in flaming letters in those fixed somnambulistic eyes: "Utter ruin, limitless despair." Only the wall saw this look, for the poor fellow never complained. He even endeavored to smile at his robust sick-nurse, when she brought him tisanes boiling hot, and gave him kindly and encouraging words, as she ministered to him. Thus the long, solitary days dragged themselves away, while the sounds of labor sought even his attic, and made him curse his forced inactivity. Why was he not sturdy and strong like others, able to resist the disappointments of life? But, after all, whom had he to work for now? His mother had left him, Cécile no longer cared for him; the faces of the two women haunted him; he was never able to banish them for a moment. When Charlotte's smile, with its commonplace and meaningless gayety, had disappeared, Cécile's pure face rose before him, veiled in the mystery of her refusal, and he lay there, crushed, incapable of a word or a gesture, while the throbbing of his temples and his pulse, his labored breathing, and his hollow cough, kept up an accompaniment to all the disturbing sounds about him, the roll of passing omnibuses, shaking the pavement, the roaring of a loom in some neighboring garret.

The day after this conversation at Jack's bed,

side, when the bread-carrier returned from her rounds, her apron white with flour, and entered the sick-room to hear how the night had passed, she was dumfounded to see a tall spectre standing before the fire, completely dressed, and holding a discussion with Bélisaire.

"What has happened? You, up and about? What does that mean?"

"He insisted upon getting up," said the peddler, despairingly. "He wants to go to the Parvis Notre-Dame."

"The Parvis Notre-Dame? What do you want there? Are we not taking enough care of you? What is wanting?"

"Nothing, nothing, my good friends. You are two generous and devoted souls, but it is impossible for me to remain here any longer; do not try to keep me, I beg of you. I must, I will go."

"But how can you do that, my poor mate, in your weak state?"

"Oh, I am rather weak. But, when one must walk, he can. Bélisaire will give me his arm. He once led me through the streets of Nantes in that way, when I was not as firm on my legs as I am now."

It was plain that he was determined to go, and it was impossible to hesitate any longer. Jack kissed Madame Bélisaire, and went downstairs, supported by the peddler, after a silent, heartrending glance of farewell towards the little lodging where he had passed such happy hours, solaced

by such beautiful dreams, the home he knew he would never see again. At this date, the Central Bureau was situated directly opposite Notre-Dame, a square monumental building, gray and gloomy in appearance, elevated by a few steps. How long it seemed, the road leading to that building from the heights of Ménilmontant! They paused frequently at stone posts, at the corners of bridges, but never stopped long, for the cold was severe. Beneath that heavy over-hanging December sky, the invalid looked more changed, more emaciated than in his alcove. His hair hung damp and straight with the perspiration, caused by walking, and he was so weak that everything whirled about him, — the dark houses, the gutters, the passers-by, who looked pityingly at the lamentable sight presented by the peddler and his companion. In this brutal Paris, where life itself is a continual struggle, the two looked like two combatants of whom one had fallen wounded in battle, while his comrade, still exposed to the fire, led him to the ambulance before returning, himself, to face danger again.

It was early when they reached the Central Bureau, and yet the large waiting-room was filled with a crowd that had been waiting for some time, seated upon wooden benches, before an enormous stove where a fire roared and crackled. The place was pervaded by a stifling, heavy, drowsy atmosphere, which communicated the same enervating languor to all who were there, — to the poor wretches who came unprepared for

the change, from the cold of the street into this sweating-box; to the clerks, writing behind their glass windows, and the porter tending to the fire, with a languid air. When Jack entered upon Bélisaire's arm, every eye was turned upon him with a surly, anxious expression.

"Just look, there is another!" those glances seemed to say; and, indeed, these hospitals are so overcrowded that every bed of suffering is envied, disputed about, canvassed for. Notwithstanding all the efforts of those in charge, this charity cannot multiply itself fast enough; there are always more patients than places to receive them. And, indeed, this terrible Paris has the faculty of originating all sorts of diseases, inventing strange unheard-of complications, aided by vice and misery, and all the possible combinations those two elements of suffering bring in their train. Numerous specimens of its skill, pitiful sights, were to be seen as they sat upon the miserable benches in that waiting-room. As fast as they entered, they were separated into two classes; on one side of the room sat those who had been mutilated in some way, by a wheel in some factory, or the machinery of a steam-engine; those who had been blinded, disfigured, or disabled by dyer's acids; on the other side of the room sat those who were suffering from fever, anæmia, phthisis, trembling of the limbs; here were people with bandaged eyes, coughs of all kinds, hollow and sharp, which seemed to wait only for one to start up; and all sounded, to-

gether, like the instruments of some ear-splitting orchestra. And what tatters, what shoes and hats, what bundles of rags, — raggedness in its most hopeless forms, rents filled with mud, frayed edges of clothing trailing in the gutter, for most of these poor creatures had come on foot, dragging themselves along like Jack. All were waiting with great anxiety the examination of the doctor, which should decide whether or not they would receive a ticket of admission to some hospital; and they could be heard talking, among themselves, of their ailments, purposely exaggerating them, each trying to outrival his neighbor in illness. Jack listened to these lugubrious conversations, seated between a big pockmarked man who coughed violently, and an unfortunate young woman wrapped in a black shawl, her body scarcely more than a shadow, her face so narrow, the nose and lips so thin and pale that the eyes alone seemed to belong to a living creature; they had the wild, startled expression of one who was haunted by the approaching vision of the last agony. A mumbling old woman, with a basket under her arm, went about, offering to sell biscuits and hard, dry, dusty-looking cakes to these fever-stricken and dying creatures, repulsed on every hand, but continuing silently upon her rounds. At last the door opened, and a little wiry man appeared.

It was the doctor!

At once there was profound silence upon the benches, but the coughing was louder than ever,

and all the faces grew longer. As he warmed his fingers at the door of the stove, the doctor inspected the sick about him with that firm, scrutinizing, practised eye that is so disconcerting to drunkenness or vice. Then he began to make a tour of the room, followed by the porter, who distributed tickets of admission to various hospitals. What delight it afforded one of these unfortunates when he was pronounced a hospital-patient! What disappointment, what supplications, when one was told he was not ill enough! The examination was a brief one, and a trifle brutal, for there were many waiting; and these poor creatures were inexhaustible upon the subject of their ailments, embellishing them with various stories and anecdotes which had no possible interest to the doctor. It is scarcely possible to form an idea of the ignorance, the stupidity, the innocence of these people, embarrassed even at being asked to give a name, an address, always afraid of compromising themselves in some way, and yet, in spite of their timidity, willing to talk forever upon matters of absolute unimportance.

"Well, madam, what ails you?" the doctor inquires of a woman with a twelve-year-old at her side.

"It is n't me, sir, it is my boy."

"And what is the matter with your boy? Come, be quick."

"He is deaf, sir. It seized him — I 'll tell you all about it."

"Oh! deaf, is he? In which ear?"

"Well, in both, mostly, sir."

"How can that be?"

"Yes, sir. Come, Edward, stand up when you are spoken to. In which ear are you deaf?" she asks the boy, shaking him to get him on his feet.

But the boy maintains an idiotic silence.

"Which ear are you deaf in?" repeats the mother, shouting at him, and, as the poor infirm creature seems quite bewildered, she adds:

"You see, sir! Just as I told you, it is mostly in both."

Further on, the doctor addresses the big pock-marked individual, who is Jack's neighbor.

"Where is the pain?"

"In my chest, sir. It all seems to burn me."

"Humph! your chest burns. Take a little brandy sometimes, don't you?"

"Oh, never, sir," answers the other, indignantly.

"Ah, very good! No brandy. But a little wine, now and then, eh?"

"As much as I need."

"And how much do you need? Several quarts, I imagine."

"Well, now, sir. That depends on the day."

"Oh, I see. On pay-day, then — "

"Well, on pay-day; you know, yourself, how it is. One is with his friends, and — "

"Yes, that 's the matter. You get drunk every pay-day. You are a mason, and paid once a week. You are dead-drunk, then, four times a

month, at the least. Very well. Show me your tongue."

Useless for the drunkard to protest; he has to admit his vice, for he has to do with one who is cross-questioner and judge as well as doctor. When the doctor reached Jack, he examined him attentively, asked his age, and whether he had been long ill. Jack answered with an effort, in a wheezing voice, and all the time he was talking, Bélisaire, standing behind him, winked and made various movements with his thick lips.

"Come, stand up, my boy," said the doctor, laying his ear against the damp clothing of the patient, to sound him. "Did you come on foot?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is amazing that you were able to walk at all, in the state you are in. You must be wonderfully energetic. But I forbid you to attempt it again. You shall be carried upon a stretcher."

"And, turning towards the clerk who was filling out the tickets, he said:

"*Charité*, — Ward Saint-Jean de Dieu."

Amid the many rapid, confused visions that pass before you in the bustling streets of Paris — visions that follow one another in rapid succession, each effacing the one before it — perhaps there is no sadder sight than one of those hanging litters, sheltered by an awning of striped ticking, swinging to and fro as it is borne on by two men, one in front, the other behind. It is perhaps a shroud no less than a bed, and the

unseeing figure vaguely outlined upon it, jolted at each step of those who bear it, stirs a sinister train of thought within you. Now and then a woman crosses herself at the sight, as when a hearse passes by. Sometimes the stretcher moves on alone, the pavement deserted at its approach; but oftener a mother, a sister, or a child follows this walking sick-bed, with eyes moist with tears at this supreme humiliation of suffering poverty. And Jack, too, heard, quite close to him, beside the porters, the unequal step of the brave peddler, who took his hand from time to time, to show him that he was not utterly abandoned. And thus, after many a jolt, drowsy and shaken-up, the patient arrived at La Charité, and was taken to the Ward Saint Jean de Dieu, on the second story, at the end of the second court. A dismal room, the ceiling supported by iron columns, the windows overlooking the gloomy yard upon one side, and on the other a damp, deep garden, twenty beds foot to foot, two large arm-chairs, an enormous stove, a table, and a big sideboard covered with a marble slab. This was the ward.

At Jack's entrance, five or six ghosts, in brown coats, cotton caps on their heads, interrupted the silent game of dominoes they were playing, to glance at the new-comer. Others, who were warming themselves, drew aside as he approached. There was only one bright corner in the immense room, — the little glazed office where the Sister sat, and in front of it an altar to the Virgin, fresh and radiant, with its laces, its artificial flowers,

its candlesticks and white wax tapers, a plaster Madonna, her arms hid in long floating sleeves that spread like wings. The Sister approached Jack, and in a very small high-pitched monotonous voice, all of whose resonance seemed to be absorbed by her wimple and veil, said:

"Oh, the poor child; how ill he looks! Quick! we must put him to bed. There is none vacant at present, but the last one over there will soon be. The occupant is very low. Meanwhile, we will have a stretcher set here for him."

What she called a stretcher was a sacking-bed, which the attendant placed beside the bed that was so soon to be vacated, but from which deep groans proceeded at that moment, long sighs which were rendered more melancholy by the despairing indifference with which every one listened to them. This man was about to die, but Jack was too ill himself, too much absorbed to take notice of this inauspicious neighborhood. He scarcely heard Bélisaire say "Good-by till to-morrow," promising to come on the following day, nor the sound of saucepans and plates, occasioned by the distribution of soup, nor the whispering around him, where there was frequent mention of Number Eleven Two, who was said to be very ill. He could not sleep, but lay in a torpor, overcome by extreme exhaustion, when a woman's clear and calm voice gave him one of those abrupt shocks that waken one who is falling asleep.

"Prayers, gentlemen."

He saw indistinctly, close to the altar, the shadowy figure of a woman, kneeling amid heavy folds of fustian; he tried vainly to follow the rapid recitation, half chanted by the lips accustomed to prayer, never pausing even to take breath, but the last words reached his attentive ear:

"Protect, O Lord, my friends, my enemies, all prisoners, all who travel by land or by sea, the sick and the dying — "

At last he fell into a fevered, troubled sleep, the agonized groans of his dying neighbor mingling with visions of prisoners rattling their chains, and travellers journeying upon a road that had no end.

He too was one of these wayfarers. He has started upon a road resembling that of Étiolles, but longer, more winding, lengthening at every step. Cécile, his mother, have preceded him, but they will not wait for him; among the trees he distinguishes the flutter of their gowns. What prevents him from joining them is a terrible row of machines, ranged along the ditches, formidable, snorting monsters, with gaping mouths, darting smoke and fire, scorching him with their fiery breath. Steam-planes, steam-saws, — all are there, working their hooks, their rods, their pistons, amid a deafening din of forge-hammers. Jack, all a-tremble, decides to pass between them, but he is seized, entangled, torn to pieces; shreds of his flesh are carried away with fragments of his blouse, his legs are burnt by great ingots of molten metal, and his whole body is enveloped in the fiery furnace, its infernal

heat penetrates even his chest. What a horrible struggle before he can emerge, and take refuge in the forest of Sénart, that borders this accursed road! — And now, beneath those fresh green boughs, Jack becomes a little child again. He is ten years old. He is returning from one of his pleasant walks with the keeper. But yonder, at a turn in the road, sits old Mother Salé, her sickle in her clenched hand, on her fagot, watching for him. He tries to run, but the old hag rushes after him, giving chase, in mad pursuit, through the immense forest, so dark and gloomy, now night has come with its sounds. On and on he runs, but the old woman runs faster. He hears her step growing nearer and nearer, the rustling of her fagot in the warren, her panting breath. She has him at last in her clutches, struggles with him, throws him down, and sits, pressing all her weight upon the child's chest, crushing it with her thorny fagot.

Jack awakes with a sudden start. He recognizes the immense room, lighted dimly by night-lamps, the rows of beds, the labored breathing, and coughs that pierce the silence. He is not dreaming now, but still he feels that weight oppressing his body, — something cold, heavy, inert and sinister, something that the attendants, brought to the spot by his cries, hasten to remove and lay in the neighboring bed again, drawing the curtains around it with a dismal and rattling sound.

XI.

SHE WILL NOT COME.

"THERE'S a sleeper for you! Come, Number Eleven *Two*, wake up. The doctor is here."

Jack opens his eyes, and they are at once attracted by the motionless draperies of the neighboring bed, that fall even to the ground.

"Well, my boy, it seems you got quite a start last night! That poor fellow who fell upon your stretcher, while he was struggling, must have given you a great fright! Come! raise yourself just a little, that we may see you. Oh, how weak we are!"

The speaker is a man thirty-five or forty years old. He wears a black velvet cap, and a big white apron, coming to a point over his chest. He has a fair beard. His glance is keen, slightly satiric even. He examines the patient, and asks him a few questions.

"Your trade?"

"A mechanic."

"Do you drink?"

"I used to, but not of late."

Then there was a long silence.

"What sort of life did you lead, my poor boy!"

The doctor said no more, fearing to frighten his patient, but Jack had surprised upon his features a look of pain and curiosity, the same sympathetic interest that had greeted him the day before at the Parvis Notre-Dame. The hospital surgeons surround the bed, and the doctor in charge explains the symptoms he has observed in the patient, — very interesting and alarming symptoms, it seems. Each pupil, in turn, comes nearer, to see for himself, what their master has observed. Jack presents his back to all those inquisitive ears, and at last, amid the words, "Inspiration, expiration, sibilant rattle, crepitating at the base and the summit of the lungs," he understands that his condition is very serious, so critical, in fact, that after the doctor has dictated his prescription to one of the house-surgeons, the Sister approaches his bedside, and with gentle consideration asks him whether he has any family in Paris, any one he would like to send for, and whether he expects any visitors to-day, as it is Sunday. His family? There it is! That pair standing at the foot of his bedside, not daring to advance, a somewhat commonplace, vulgar-looking couple, of the people, but their faces are kindly and smiling. These are all the relatives, the friends he has. They alone have never injured him.

"Well, now, how are you? A little better?" asks Bélisaire, who has been told his comrade can never recover, and hides his great longing to cry beneath an air of assumed gayety. Madame

Bélisaire places a couple of oranges she has brought upon a shelf, close to Jack, and after she has given him the latest news of her big-headed child, continues her visit, seated by the bed with her husband, who cannot utter a word. Neither does Jack speak. His eyes are wide open and fixed. Of what is he thinking? Only a mother could fathom his thoughts.

"Say, Jack," Madame Bélisaire suddenly asks, "shall I go and fetch your mother?"

His dimmed eyes brighten, and rest upon the worthy woman with a smile. Yes, that is what he wants. Now that he knows he is dying, he forgets all the suffering his mother has caused him. He needs her near him, where he may press close to her. Madame Bélisaire is for rushing off at once, but the peddler restrains her, and an animated discussion takes place in an undertone at the foot of the bed. The husband does not wish his wife to go there. He knows that she is angry with "the fine Madame," that she detests the man with the moustaches, and that if they do not let her in, she will storm, make a row, and perhaps be carried off to the station. The fear of the latter plays a most important part in Bélisaire's existence. The bread-carrier knows how timid her husband is, and how easily he can be shown out.

"No, no, I shall bring her back this time, never fear," he says at last, with a confident and energetic air that communicates itself to his companion, and he starts off; but this time he

is even more unlucky than upon the previous day.

"Where are you going?" asks the concierge, stopping him at the foot of the stairs.

"To the d'Argentons'."

"Are you the one who came here last evening?"

"The same," answers Bélisaire, in all the innocence of his heart.

"Well, it's no use for you to go up; there's no one there. They have gone to the country, and they won't be back for some time."

Gone to the country, in such weather as this, with the air so chilled and full of snow! That does not seem possible to Bélisaire. He insists vainly, tells the concierge that the lady's son is very ill in the hospital, but he talks to no purpose. The other does not question his story; nevertheless, he will not permit the peddler even to cross the mat at the foot of the stairs. And, full of despair, Bélisaire finds himself out in the street again. But suddenly a happy thought occurs to him. Jack had never told what had happened between the Rivals and himself; he had merely said that the marriage was broken off. But even in Indret, and still more in Paris, when they lived together, the old doctor's kindness of heart had often been a topic of conversation. What if Bélisaire should find him, and bring that beloved and sympathetic face to the death-bed of his poor mate? Said and done! He will go home and get his pack, for he never travels without that basket of hats on his back; and, shivering and

bent, he starts upon the road to Étiolles, where Jack had met him for the first time. Alas, we know already what awaited him at the end of that long journey.

All this time Madame Bélisaire remains at the bedside of their friend, and cannot understand the meaning of this long absence — is unable to calm the anxiety of the patient, whom the thought of seeing his mother again has greatly excited. What increases his restlessness still more is the throng that Sunday brings to these hospital-beds. At every moment the door opens, and Jack watches each arrival. There are working men, people of the middle classes, neatly dressed, and they move about the beds, talking with the sick whom they have come to see, encouraging them, trying to make them smile with some anecdote, some recollection of family life, or something they have seen on the way. Often the voices are choked with sobs, though the eyes try to press back the tears. There are awkward speeches, moments of embarrassing silence, that air of repression and constraint that intercepts speech when it falls from the lips of the well and strong, over the tossed, disordered pillow of the dying. Jack listens vaguely to the gentle murmur of all these voices, above which floats the fragrance of oranges. But what a disappointment is in store for him, when, raising himself at each new arrival, aided by a little bar hanging from a cord above his head, he sees that it is not his mother, and sinks back more exhausted, more

despairing than ever! For Jack, as for all at death's door, the little remnant of life that remains, the slender thread ever weakening, is too fragile to hold him to the robust years of youth, but carries him back to the first hours of his existence. He is a child again. It is no longer Jack the mechanic, but little Jack (with a K), the godson of Lord Peambock, the little fair-haired, velvet-clad boy of Ida de Barancy, waiting for his mother.

And still no one comes.

Yet the place is full of people, — women, children, little ones who look in surprise at their father in a convalescent's gown, are amazed to see how thin he has grown; they utter cries of admiration at sight of the wonderful little altar, and the Sister can hardly restrain them. But Jack's mother does not come. The bread-carrier's eloquence is quite exhausted. She has invented everything she can; d'Argenton is ill perhaps, or they have gone on some Sunday excursion; she can think of nothing else to say, and to hide her embarrassment, she has spread a colored handkerchief upon her knees, and is slowly peeling the oranges.

"She will not come," said Jack, as he had said before, that other time in the little house at Charonne. But his voice is sharper than upon that evening, and, in spite of its weakness, has a tremor of anger. "I am sure she will not come."

And the unhappy boy closes his eyes, overcome by extreme lassitude; but he ponders other griefs,

stores up in his heart all the wrecks of his love, and strives to call "Cécile! Cécile!" — though not a sound issues from his mute lips. The Sister hears the groan and comes nearer, asking, in a whisper, of Madame Bélisaire, whose broad face glistens with tears:

"What ails this poor boy? He seems to be suffering more than before."

"It is his mother he wants, Sister. His mother does not come; he expects her, and he is eating his heart out, poor fellow."

"She ought to be sent for at once."

"My husband has gone for her. But you see, she is a fine lady. Very likely she is afraid she might soil her dress in a hospital."

Then she rose with a sudden outburst of anger.

"Don't cry, my dear," she said, as if speaking to her little boy. "I will go and fetch your mother myself."

Jack had heard what she said, but he continued to repeat, in a hoarse voice, his eyes never wandering from the door:

"She will not come! She will not come!"

The Sister tries to say a few words:

"Come, my child, calm yourself." Then he raised himself, in a sort of mad frenzy.

"I tell you, she will not come! You do not know her. She is a bad mother. Every sorrow of my life has come to me through her. My heart is torn with all the wounds she has given me. When *he* pretended to be ill, she ran to him at once, and would not leave his side. But

I am dying, and she will not come. Oh, a wicked, wicked, heartless mother! It is she who has killed me, and she does not wish to see me die."

Exhausted by this effort, Jack's head falls back upon the pillow. The Sister bends over him, trying to console and soothe him, while the gloomy winter day is fast drawing to a close, fading dismally, the yellow twilight sky full of snow.

Charlotte and d'Argenton had just alighted from a carriage on the Quai. They were returning from a people's concert in full dress, — furs, light gloves, velvet, and laces. She was radiant, for she had just been exhibiting herself in public with her poet, in all her charms, her complexion rendered more brilliant by the biting cold, and muffled in that winter luxury that lends a woman's beauty a finer aspect, — the brilliancy of some precious jewel protected by the soft quilting of its casket. A tall, robust daughter of the people, standing guard before the door, sprang forward, and stood in front of her.

"Madame, madame, you must come at once."

"Madame Bélisaire!" exclaimed Charlotte, growing pale.

"Your son is very ill. He is asking for you. Come."

"But this is persecution," said d'Argenton. "If the gentleman is ill we will send our doctor to him."

"He has doctors, and more of them than he needs, for he is at the hospital."

"At the hospital?"

"Yes, for the present; but for how long I cannot tell you. If you wish to see him, you must make haste."

"Come, come, Charlotte, this is an outrageous lie; there is some trick behind it," said the poet, trying to drag her towards the staircase.

"Madame, your son is dying. Oh, merciful God, can there be such mothers as these?"

Charlotte could endure it no longer.

"Take me to him," she said.

And the two women hastened along the quay, leaving d'Argenton astonished and furious, convinced that the enemy was playing some trick upon him.

At the moment that the bread-carrier left the hospital, two people entered it hastily, with anxious faces. They hurried through the tumultuous crowd which was beginning to leave: a young girl and an old man.

"Where is he? Where is he?"

A heavenly face bends over Jack's bed.

"Jack, it is I. It is Cécile."

Yes, it is she. It is her own pure face, pale with watching and weeping; and the hand he holds in his is the hand that has blessed him so often in the past, and yet has helped to bring him where he now lies, for fate is sometimes very cruel, and strikes at us through our dearest and best. The sick man opens and closes his eyes, to be quite sure that he is not mistaken. Cécile is still there. He hears her silvery voice. She

is speaking to him, begging his forgiveness, explaining why she had caused him such pain. Ah! if she had but suspected that their histories were so much alike! As she continues, a great peace fills Jack's heart, and his bitterness and anger and suffering vanish.

"Then you love me still; you are sure of that?"

"I have never loved any one but you, Jack, and I never shall love any one else."

Whispered in that commonplace recess, which had already witnessed such mournful death-scenes, the word "Love" assumed a surpassing sweetness, as if some stray dove had taken refuge there, beating its wings against the folds of the hospital-curtains.

"How good of you to come, Cécile. Now I will never complain again. It seems nothing now to die, with you beside me, and reconciled."

"Die! Who talks of dying?" asked Father Rivals in his gruffest voice. "Never fear, my son, we will pull you through. Already you do not look the same as when we arrived."

And in fact, for a moment his face was transfigured by that transient flush that sunset-glow which the vanishing of a star, or a soul seems to shed around it in one final, supreme effort.

He held Cécile's hand pressed against his cheek, resting against it lovingly, and whispering many things to her.

"All that I lacked in life you have been to me — you have been my all, my sister, my friend, wife, and mother!"

But this sudden exaltation was followed by a lifeless torpor, the flush of fever by the livid hue of one who has fainted. All the ravages of disease were indented upon his features, which contracted slightly because of the difficulty of his breathing, accompanied by a whistling sound. Cécile cast a glance of alarm towards her grandfather. The shadows deepened in the room; and those who were there felt their hearts rent by the approach of a presence sadder, more mysterious than that of the night. Suddenly Jack tried to raise himself, his eyes wide open.

"Listen, listen! Some one's step on the stairs! She is coming!"

They heard the wintry wind sweep over the stairway, the last murmurs of the crowd dispersing, and distant rumblings in the street. He listened closely for a moment, uttered a few indistinct words, and then his eyes closed again. Two women rushed up the stairway. They had been permitted to enter, although the visiting-hour was passed. There are cases where rules must be broken. When they reached the door of Ward Saint-Jean, after passing through the yards, and hurrying over the stairs, Charlotte stopped short.

"I am afraid," she said.

"Come, come, you must," said the other. "I tell you one thing. Women like you ought not to have children."

And she pushed her ahead roughly. Oh, that great bleak room, lighted only by night-lamps,

those ghost-like, kneeling figures, the shadowy outline of the curtains — the mother saw it all at a glance; and further on, at the end of the room, a bed, two men bending over it, and Cécile Rivals, standing, herself as pale as death, as pale as the man whose head her arms were supporting.

"Jack, my child!"

Mr. Rivals turned around.

"Hush," he said.

They listened. There was an indistinct murmur, a little plaintive, sibilant sound, then a long sigh.

Charlotte came nearer, trembling and apprehensive. Was that her Jack, that lifeless face, those outstretched hands, the motionless body, over which her eyes wandered despairingly, seeking some sign of life?

The doctor bent over him.

"Jack, my dear, it is your mother. She has come."

And the unhappy woman, her arms outstretched, ready to rush forward, cried:

"Jack, it is I. I am here."

Not a movement.

The mother uttered a terrible cry:

"Dead?"

"No," answered old Rivals, sternly, "not death — DELIVERANCE!"


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